

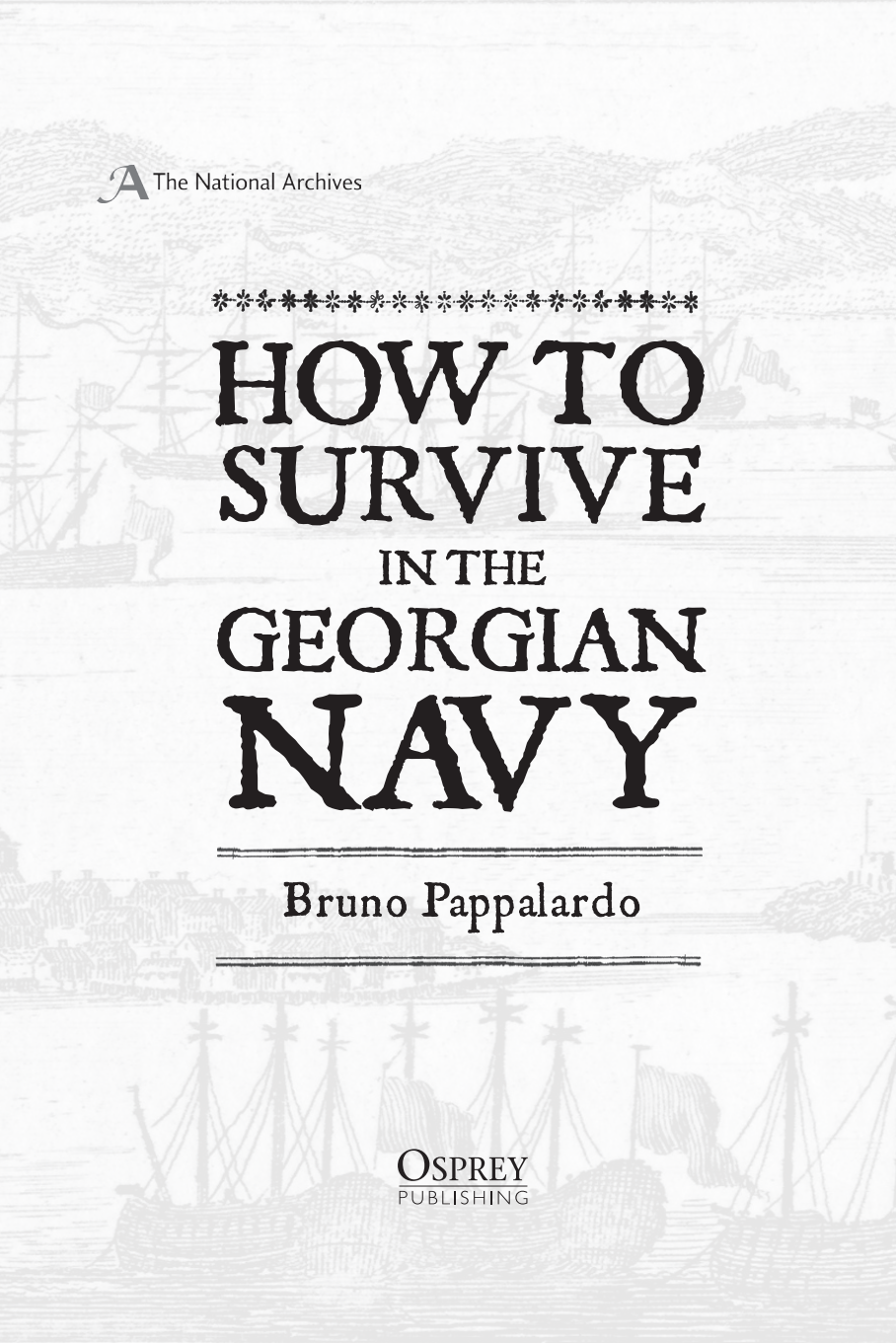
HOW TO SURVIVE IN THE GEORGIAN NAVY

A Sailor's Guide



BRUNO PAPPALARDO

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Bruno Pappalardo

OSPREY
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INTRODUCTION

THE
FOUNDATIONS
OF A
GEORGIAN
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The accession of a 54-year-old German, George I, crowned king of Great Britain on 20 October 1714, the first monarch of the House of Hanover, signalled the end of any Catholic claim to the British throne. The 1701 Act of Settlement barred Catholics from ruling Britain, and the Protestant George, second cousin to the recently deceased Queen Anne, was crowned king ahead of her Catholic half-brother, James Francis Edward Stuart, and more than 50 other Catholics closer in succession by primogeniture. Domestically, this appeased English and Scottish Protestants whose bonds had been strengthened by the Union of Parliaments of England and Scotland Act in 1706. However, the threat of a Jacobite rebellion and attempts to restore a Catholic monarchical succession remained ever-present.

George I now ruled Britain, whose participation in a 13-year war against France and Bourbon Spain (the War of the Spanish Succession 1701–14) had ended with the signing of one of the first peace settlement treaties (of Utrecht) in 1713. This marked a period of relative stability – except for the War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718–20), which saw Spain thwarted in its attempts to reclaim lands lost in Italy to the Austrian Habsburgs by an alliance of Britain, France, Austria, the Dutch republic and later Savoy – until the recommencement of hostilities with France and Spain in 1739, and the War of the Austrian Succession (1739–48).

Britain emerged from the War of the Spanish Succession in 1715 with the largest navy in Europe. Amounting to a total of 182 ships, it was

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George I of England.

more than twice the size of Britain's potential main enemy, France, which together with the Netherlands and Spain was financially exhausted. Royal Navy captures during this conflict of Gibraltar in 1704 by Sir George Rooke, followed by Minorca and Sardinia in 1708 by Admiral Sir John Leake, had further strengthened Britain's naval position in the Mediterranean.

Peace and stability in Europe depended on a delicately shared balance of power between the Netherlands, France, Spain and Britain, which was maintained by diplomacy, treaties, military strength, monarchical family ties, and alliances made with one another and with smaller, weaker countries. Furthermore, British trading opportunities were expanding, with large quantities of sugar and tobacco being imported from the West Indies and American colonies, and with

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supplies of silk and cotton from China and India respectively. The importance to King George I of a strong Royal Navy grew ever greater, not only for safeguarding Britain's defence against invasion from foreign countries or against a Jacobite rebellion, but also as a state instrument of war; the Navy had a vital role in protecting a growing trading empire, her mercantile interests and shipping routes, as well as being an integral part of Britain's stake in a European power struggle and race for lucrative new trade routes and undiscovered or underdeveloped countries to colonise or trade with. To perform this role effectively the Royal Navy required facilities both at home and overseas that could service, supply and maintain naval ships in readiness for quick mobilisation whenever or wherever it was required; state financial support; and an effective government-run organisational and administrative infrastructure to support this, along with the ships and right calibre of professional officers and a system of recruiting ever-increasing numbers of seamen to serve in it.

Following his accession, King George I continued to devolve administrative control of the Royal Navy to the Lords Commissioners for executing the Office of the Lord High Admiral, commonly known as the Board of Admiralty (or the Admiralty). The First Commissioner of the Board of Admiralty was known as the First Lord of the Admiralty and was usually a senior admiral. Many First Lords were serving officers and members of Parliament either in the House of Commons or House of Lords and were responsible to Parliament and the king on all matters of naval command and administration. Other members of the Board served in an advisory capacity. The First Lord was part of the Cabinet, headed by the prime minister, which controlled the business of government.

The Cabinet (a smaller nucleus of the Privy Council, which also advised the king), including secretaries of state, was in control of strategic naval deployment and finance, and set the levels of Royal Navy finance and manning that would be requested from Parliament in the form of yearly 'naval estimates'. The annual naval estimates were essentially split into three parts: the ordinary estimate, which covered ship maintenance and dockyards; the extra estimate, for the building of new ships,

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maintenance and any outstanding debt; and estimates for the number of seamen and marines that were required for the next year. These estimates could fluctuate sharply in times of war and peace. The Board of Trade and Plantations established in 1696 represented the ever-increasing colonial and shipping interests to the government. Although it lacked direct representation at Cabinet level it was influential in advising and taking an active role in the execution of colonial naval operations.

The Board of Admiralty's principal duties in its daily meetings were to decide on individual commissioned officers' appointments and promotions, and fleet and ships' movements. Orders emanating from the Board were dealt with by the Admiralty Office, whose clerical staff communicated decisions to other boards. The secretaries of the Admiralty were significant figures in their own right, often making decisions on minor matters without recourse to the Admiralty.

The Admiralty was supported in its work by an intricate but sometimes overlapping system of administration by boards. Subordinate to the Admiralty but independent to it was the Navy Board, the origins of which can be traced to 1546. The Navy Board's remit extended to nearly all the Royal Navy warrant officers (including the boatswains, carpenters and cooks), their examinations and their appointments to ships. Other warrant officers such as masters, surgeons and pursers were not examined by the Navy Board but their appointments to ships was controlled by it. Significantly, the Navy Board was responsible for: the sourcing of materials to build ships (mainly timber); the building and maintenance of these ships, the dockyards and their buildings; supervising the Sick and Wounded Board, which was formed in 1653 and was responsible for medical care and the exchange of prisoners of war; overseeing the Victualling Board, which was set up in 1683 and made and supplied food and drink and oversaw the pursers who distributed it on board ships; and managing the Transport Board, first appointed in 1686, the main function of which was the transportation of victuals to ships at sea and the ferrying of troops overseas.

At the head of the Navy Board was the Controller of the Navy, followed by the Surveyors of the Navy, who were responsible for ship

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design, building and maintenance. The Navy Board had its own secretary, known as the Clerk of the Acts, and Controllers of the Storekeepers, Victualling and Treasurer accounts. The major dockyards also had their own commissioners. The main responsibility of the Navy Board was overseeing the purchase of all materials in relation to the building of ships and dockyard facilities from civilian contractors.

The Ordnance Office, although not strictly involved in naval administration, supplied guns and ammunition to the Royal Navy.

The responsibility for accounting and pay across the Admiralty and the Royal Navy was dealt with by a number of offices and officials, but principally by the Treasurer of the Navy, the Navy Pay Office, the Comptroller of the Navy (part of the Navy Board), and the Comptroller of Treasurer's Accounts.

A small number of pensions were paid to officers by the Treasurer of the Navy from 1672, and some financial aid was given to dependents of ratings killed as a result of service in the Royal Navy from 1581 by the Chatham Chest. Furthermore, some seamen were entered into the Royal Greenwich Hospital from 1704 as in-pensioners, and the Greenwich Hospital School was set up in the early 18th century to maintain and provide education for sons of seamen killed in action.

The Royal Navy had become the largest, costliest and technologically most advanced organisation of its time and it was required to be kept in a state of readiness – trained and manned – in times of peace, ready to be called upon in the event of war. Arguably, the manning issue was perhaps the most difficult issue the Admiralty faced and confidence in the quality of its officers was lacking; as Samuel Pepys remarked: 'there is no such thing as a bad sailor only a bad officer'. This issue had previously been addressed by both Pepys – who was Clerk of the Acts to the Navy Board in 1660–73 and First Secretary of the Admiralty in 1673–79 and 1684–16 – and the naval-minded kings Charles II and James II (the latter also being a Lord High Admiral, who personally took command of the fleet in the Second Dutch War). Under Pepys, the Naval Discipline Act, incorporating the Articles of War (brought into force in 1661), introduced a uniform disciplinary code of conduct to the Navy. Professional examinations for

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A Greenwich Hospital Pensioner.

would-be officers to the rank of lieutenant were introduced in 1677 with the aim of recruiting the right quality of officer, who had served at least three years at sea, including one year as a midshipman.

These officers, along with the existing service officers, formed a permanent cadre who now had the possibility of a career in the navy. A system of half pay – a fee paid to retain the services of officers who were not employed – was also introduced in 1668. This did not extend to the seamen (ratings) who made up most of the personnel serving in the Royal Navy and who were employed in vast numbers in times of war. In times of peace, however, there was no need to have as many ships, therefore thousands of ratings were laid off, until the next emergency arose. The problem of manning its ships was something that the Royal Navy had to grapple with right up until the 19th century.

CHAPTER ONE

THE OFFICERS
AND RATINGS
OF THE
GEORGIAN
ROYAL NAVY



The personnel employed by the Georgian Navy from 1714 to 1820 can be divided into two groups: officers and seamen (ratings). Many different ranks were used by the Royal Navy to describe and distinguish its officers, but essentially they can be separated into two categories: commissioned officers and warrant officers.

OFFICERS

The types of commissioned officers were: admirals (flag officers), commodores, captains, commanders and lieutenants. These officers were placed in charge of ships, squadrons of ships, fleets and naval stations, and were ultimately responsible for ships or stations they commanded, discipline on board ships, battle plans and fighting tactics. Usually, their careers consisted of periods of employment marked by separate commissions – hence the term ‘commissioned officer’ – and periods of unemployment, during which they were paid half pay, a retainer fee for their services.

Warrant officers consisted of: carpenters, boatswains, gunners, surgeons, cooks, pursers and masters, although from 1808 onwards masters, surgeons and pursers were regarded as commissioned officers in status. Although employed by the Admiralty, most warrant officers were examined, warranted and responsible to specific administrative bodies, such as the Navy and Ordnance Boards and Trinity House.

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These officers undertook specialist functions on board ship: for example, the surgeon looked after the health of the crew; the purser was in charge of victuals, wages and stores; and the master was responsible for the navigation and sailing of the ship and in status was ranked with lieutenants. Ultimately, all warrant officers were commanded by the captain. Boatswains, cooks, pursers, gunners and carpenters were referred to as 'standing officers' and were warranted to a ship indefinitely irrespective of whether their ship was in active service or not. Warrant officers too received separate warrants for each new appointment and could also receive half pay.



*Drawing of a 'Lieutenant' in typical uniform of the later 18th century
by Thomas Rowlandson c.1799.*

RATINGS

After these officers in terms of naval rank structure came ‘the people’ (ratings). A rating or ‘rate’ was given to seamen in respect of their skill and experience and the type of duty they were expected to perform when they first joined a ship by the captain, master and boatswain, or by the gunner and carpenter if they were to serve in their crews. Much of a ship’s crew, and indeed most of the Navy, consisted of ratings. They were responsible to, and came under the command and discipline of, officers, and their many diverse duties were essential in ensuring that the ships they served on operated in an efficient and effective manner.



Drawing of a sailor in typical dress of the later 18th century by Thomas Rowlandson c.1799.

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The Royal Navy has used numerous ‘ratings’ to describe the types of seamen it employed, but special mention has to be made of midshipman, master’s mate, volunteer per order and captain’s servant. Although clearly ratings, these terms were used to distinguish men who were serving to become commissioned officers, and whose status and social background was very different to that of most ‘normal’ seamen. Petty officers such as quartermasters and quartergunners were at the top end of the rating structure because they were responsible for specific tasks, such as keeping guns in working order. Some ratings were put in charge of particular parts of the ship, such as the captains of the top, afterguard and forecastle, although for many the most recognisable ratings of the Georgian Navy are the able seaman and ordinary seaman. Right at the bottom was the landsman – the lowest rating used in the Royal Navy, which applied to those who had no previous experience of serving at sea and often carried out unskilled work on board ship.

CHAPTER TWO

JOINING
THE
GEORGIAN
ROYAL
NAVY



The benefits of joining the Georgian Royal Navy as a commissioned officer were not altogether obvious; it was a taxing, strenuous, dangerous and ill-paid profession. Pay depended on the type of ship served on as well as the processing of accounts and paperwork, which frequently took years to complete and were often in arrears. Many of the respectable occupations available to sons of nobility and gentry who were not looking after estates – for example, in politics, the legal system or service in the army – required connections, influence and considerable finance. The Royal Navy, by contrast, offered a career path that was not dependent on wealth and influence, as well as the possibility of adventure and employment from a young age. Moreover, the inducement of prize money, as the result of the capture of a ship that was officially condemned in an Admiralty prize court, potentially offered significant rewards on a sliding scale for admirals and captains right down to ratings. For example, Admiral George Anson, upon capturing enemy ships in the First Battle of Finisterre in 1747, gained £300,000 in prize money. Indeed, some officers banked on it; Admiral Boscawen wrote to his wife in regards to purchasing their new house: ‘I flatter myself to make the French pay for this building ... I have ... at least one-fifth ... already, and another trip to the southward will bring three or four sugar ships more in our way’. What’s more, officers were often rewarded for protecting merchants’ goods in convoy escort duty by merchant trading companies, and could also augment their pay by freighting valuable cargo, such as gold bullion, on commission.

Joining the Georgian Royal Navy

Many of the ways by which officers joined the Georgian Royal Navy between 1714 and 1820 were established in the 16th century.

COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

Up to the 1630s it was a captain's responsibility to choose the lieutenants and the crew of ships, whereas captains themselves were selected by the naval authorities. This left some room for corruption, and captains sometimes did not fill all the vacancies of a ship's crew, even at lieutenant's rank, so that they could pocket the difference in wages themselves. In a bid to stop this fraudulent practice the government decided it would appoint lieutenants.

Much concern was expressed by the government and naval authorities about the quality and professional competence of its commissioned officers during the 17th-century Anglo-Dutch wars. These concerns centred around 'gentlemen officers' from wealthy and aristocratic backgrounds who had received commissions and promotions not on the basis of their ability, but through patronage and 'interest' ahead of more deserving and experienced professional seamen – 'tarpaulin officers' who lacked the right social background and 'connections'. A prime example of this was the rapid promotion of Sir William Berkley between 1661 and 1665 from lieutenant to vice-admiral.

As a result, measures were brought in to ensure that the most suitable candidates were recruited as commissioned officers. In 1655, the government ordered that no man could be rated midshipman unless he could undertake the duties of a commissioned officer. Examinations were introduced from 1677 to test whether would-be lieutenants had the relevant skills, knowledge and experience required to perform the duties expected of that rank. Candidates taking this examination had to be aged 20 or over and were required to have served at least three years at sea (later extended to six) – one year of which was to be served as a midshipman – and produce certificates signed by their captains confirming they were suited to becoming a lieutenant. Samuel Pepys,

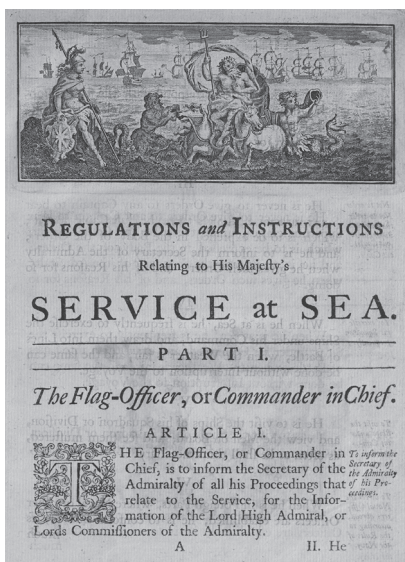
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who had been Clerk of the Acts to the Navy Board (1660–73), and First Secretary of the Admiralty (1673–79 and 1684–89), was a driving force for the introduction of these examinations and reflected with obvious satisfaction that the training of potential commissioned officers as ratings had produced positive results for the Royal Navy, since it was an encouragement to the: ‘true breed seamen [tarpaulin] because I thank god we have not half the throng of those bastard breed [gentlemen] pressing for employments which we heretofore used to be troubled with, they being conscious of their inability to pass this examination, and know it to be no purpose now to solicit for employments till they have done it’.

Most aspiring commissioned officers were sons of peers, baronets or the landed gentry. They could join the Navy in several ways to serve the necessary qualifying time to be able to sit the lieutenancy examination. The traditional method was as a ‘captain’s servant’. This rating was given to boys who served a type of apprenticeship under the patronage of a captain, who took them to sea more often than not to oblige relatives or friends. This custom of allowing officers their own ‘retinue’ went back to the Middle Ages. In 1700, captains were allowed four such servants for every 100 men on board their ships. This led to an common abuse of the system in that captains would enter the names of boys on ship’s musters without them actually being on board as captain’s servants, thereby giving them false sea time to qualify them for the lieutenancy examination once they were older. One such captain was Sir Isaac Coffin, who was court-martialled in 1788 for keeping false musters having entered the names of four boys, including two of Lord Dorchester’s sons, for this very reason.

Another way of becoming a commissioned officer in the Royal Navy was as a volunteer. A new rating of volunteer by order with the patronage of the King was introduced in 1676, with the aim of recruiting ‘young gentlemen’ to the Navy ‘who are more sensible of honor than a man of meaner birth’. They had to be at least 16 years of age and ‘brought up by times at sea ... and willing to apply themselves to the learning of navigation and fitting themselves for the service of the sea’. These volunteers, also known as ‘King’s Letter Boys’ because their appointment was by authority of the King, tended to be older than captains’ servants and were

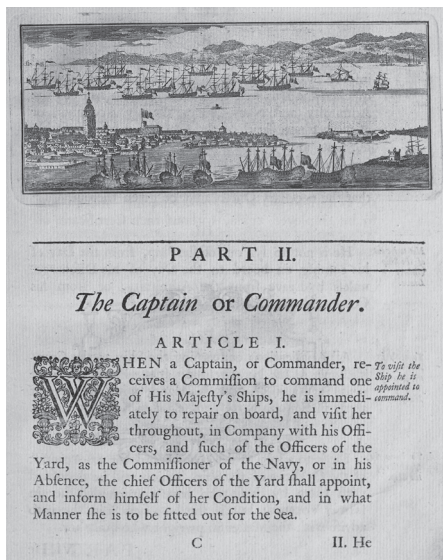
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Duties of a commander in chief or flag officer from Instructions for Service at Sea, 1757

nominated by the Admiralty for service in ships. Captains receiving 'Kings Letter Boys' had to ensure they were employed, sometimes much to their annoyance, as this meant there was one less vacancy they could personally fill with their own protégés. These Admiralty nominations went a long way in guaranteeing a candidate promotion to commissioned rank after the volunteer had served the requisite two years at sea and passed the examination for the rank of lieutenant. However, this system attracted some scathing criticism due to the type of officers being recruited 'your gentlemen captains are sons of noblemen, brothers or kinsmen to bedchamber men, kinsmen to waiteing [sic] gentlemen, pages ... sent to sea ... butterfly captains ... coachmen, footmen, and the relations and friends and sometimes stallions and bastards of lewd women ... some snotty-nosed letter man, the product of some quondam

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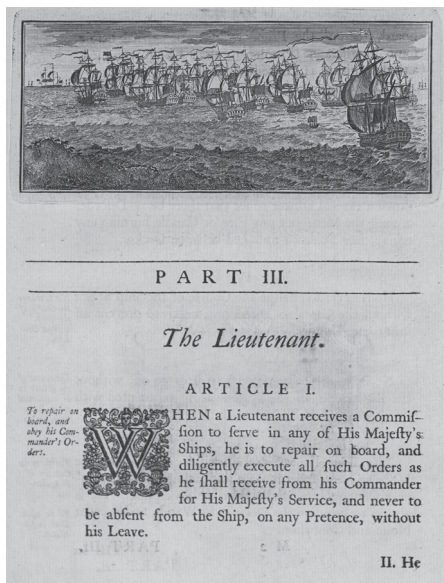
Duties of a ship's captain from Instructions for Service at Sea, 1757

punk, or alewife'. Famous King's Letter Boys included George Byng, the Earl of Torrington, and the last ever King's Letter Boy, George Brydges Rodney. This system of 'King's Letter Boys' ceased in 1728.

From 1729, the Admiralty proposed to start a 'Naval Academy', which would provide training to college volunteers before they went to sea. This academy was established at Portsmouth in 1733, and its aim was to professionally train a maximum of 40 future officers, who were to be 'sons of noblemen and gentlemen' aged between 13 and 16. Individuals who had served at sea were also encouraged to enrol, but preference was given to sons of officers. Entrance fees were expensive – on a par with those of Eton College.

Candidates wishing to study at the academy had to demonstrate 'a considerable proficiency in Latin' and pass an entrance examination. In a three-year course, students were taught writing, arithmetic, drawing,

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Duties of a lieutenant from Instructions for Service at Sea, 1757

fortification, mathematics, fencing and the use of the flintlock. Furthermore, they would work in a dockyard to gain familiarity with ships' rigging and cannons. At the end of the course students who passed the Academy's examination only had to serve four years, as opposed to six, at sea, to take the examination for lieutenantancy.

The college was not welcomed by existing Royal Naval captains as it meant it potentially reduced their privilege of appointing boys to their ships. At the academy itself, overall the behaviour of the students was good but there were instances when these standards fell. One instance involved a group of students who absconded to the nearest tavern, returning to the academy 'very drunk'. In fact, one of the party – George Dashwood – was so drunk that the headmaster was obliged to call a surgeon for assistance and relief. Some concerns were also expressed

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about the cleanliness of the academy, with complaints that the ‘scholars heads abound with vermin’. As a result, instructions were issued that:

‘care is to be taken that they appear constantly washed and combed at breakfast and dinner. Each scholar is to have a clean shirt, stock or cravat, stocking and handkerchief three times a week and clean sheets once a month. The beds are to be made by the maid servant, who is to sweep their bedrooms daily and occasionally also wash them’.

By 1773 the academy had only 15 students. To increase its numbers, the Admiralty made provision for 15 officers’ sons to be educated at public expense, leaving 25 places for the ‘nobility and gentry’. In 1773 the academy became known as the Royal Naval Academy and in 1806 the Royal Naval College. At this point, the student intake was increased to 70 and the buildings it occupied were enlarged. However, the academy continued to experience difficulties in attracting would be officers, and in 1837 stopped taking in students. Scholars of note who did attend the school include Philip Broke, captain of HMS *Shannon*, who is famous for his victory over the USS *Chesapeake* in 1812; and Jane Austen’s two brothers, Francis and Charles, who later became admirals.

The number of ranks and ratings on board each ship was fixed by the Admiralty. This limit on numbers meant that it was sometimes difficult for ‘young gentlemen’ under Admiralty patronage to secure employment on board a ship given that captains chose a ship’s crew and were more likely to favour their own choice of men. So that volunteers per order (1676–1729) and college volunteers (1729–1816) were given an opportunity to acquire the necessary qualifying time to take the lieutenancy examination, Pepys introduced during the 1660s the rank of midshipman ordinary. This rank was treated as a supernumerary, paid only as an able seaman, and took the place of a seaman on board a ship.

The rating of captain’s servant was abolished in 1794 and was replaced by volunteer first class, the number of which was officially limited. Boys’ age of entry was set at 13 unless they were sons of officers, in which case they could be 11. The Admiralty, however, still had no

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great control over who could be nominated as a volunteer first class; this was still the personal decision of captains. By the early 1830s captains were selecting fewer candidates as volunteers first class, mainly because after the Treaty of Paris in 1815 fewer officers were required.

WARRANT OFFICERS

Historically, the Admiralty took more of a direct interest in commissioned officers than in warrant officers, who were regulated and examined for professional competency by separate administrative boards, and were appointed to ships not by captains, but directly by the Admiralty, Navy Board or Ordnance Board. The qualifications required for the various types of warrant officers in comparison to commissioned officers were less specific. To reach the rank of purser, boatswain, gunner or carpenter it was essential to serve a long time at sea, as an understudy to the officers mentioned, accumulating the knowledge and experience needed for a warrant. Promotion to warrant officer rank was dependent on a captain's recommendation, so would-be warrant officers had to show captains through their work that they were suitable for advancement. For warrant officer ranks such as masters and surgeons not only was time served at sea useful, but the person aspiring to that rank also had to pass a professional examination that would qualify them for a possible warrant.

RATINGS

Britain did not have a permanent body of seamen (ratings) who served in the Royal Navy until the introduction of continuous service in 1853. Before then, seamen were employed by the Navy on a 'hire and fire' basis depending on its manpower needs, which were always more acute in times of war, and jobbing seamen alternated between working in the Royal Navy, Merchant Navy or in a privateering capacity. There existed no regular, systematic way of recruiting or indeed training men for naval service. Instead, bounty

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money was used to attract volunteers and this varied depending on whether the man was rated able, ordinary or landsman.

In peacetime, there were usually enough volunteers thanks to the attraction of going to sea. These included the popularity of certain captains and officers, the prospect of promotion, the provision of daily victuals (food), the possibility of prize money, pensions for some forms of injury, and bounty money. Wages for seamen remained static from 1653 to 1797: the monthly pay for an able seaman was 24 shillings; an ordinary seaman, 19 shillings; and a landsman 18 shillings. These sums would be still less after deductions were made for any purchase of slops (clothes), or tobacco, or treatment for venereal disease. Wages paid to seamen in the Royal Navy were often considerably lower than those in the Merchant Navy.

During times of war, however, the Navy had to recruit men quickly – for example, during the 17th-century Anglo-Dutch Wars more than 20,000 men were required since there was not a sufficient supply of volunteers. In such circumstances the government had to resort to ‘impressment’: the forcible recruitment of men to serve in the fleet. Seamen were ‘pressed’ by press gangs under the command of officers, which usually operated in seaports, often near ale houses, but also in towns, to press into service any seamen living there or who were visiting. Men were sometimes taken under protest and in violent circumstances. The unfortunate individuals were entered on a ship’s pay list as ‘pressed men’ or ‘landsmen’ and were paid lower wages than seamen who had volunteered.

Perhaps not surprisingly, there were many instances of violent protests against the operation of press gangs. In 1741 a crowd of ‘300 or more, all armed with firearms, swords and clubs’ in Dublin rescued men who had been pressed from the local town rendezvous. Five hundred haymakers in 1803 also defied a press gang in Barking attempting to impress them. Women, too, were militant against the press gangs that attempted to recruit their husbands or partners; in 1803, hundreds of women tried to rescue an impressed man from the Clerkenwell sessions house, and in the north-east women were indicted for rioting and throwing ‘a quantity of stones and brickbatts’ at one Lieutenant Mitchell, who was in charge of a press gang searching for recruits in South Shields.

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Despite this, the government claimed the right to press men and various acts of Parliament were passed in an attempt to legalise the practice. One of these was an Act of 1556 that dismissed a claim by Thames watermen for exemption from impressment. An act passed in 1563 protected fishermen and mariners from the press on land, but not if they were at sea. Various Vagrancy Acts, notably the one passed in 1597, allowed disreputable characters to be drafted into service. As a result of acts passed in 1703 and 1740 apprentices under the age of 18 and men over 55 were exempt from impressment. In addition Masters and Mates of merchant ships and seamen in outward bound ships who carried certificates known as ‘protections’ were also exempt. In times of war, however, press gangs operated ‘hot presses’ which meant men could be pressed regardless of any protections they may have carried.

The impressment service operated at sea as well as on land. Homeward-bound merchant ships could therefore be stopped by naval ships and a number of crew could be exchanged with men from the ‘pressing’ naval ship. The exchange of men, known as ‘Men in Lieu’, allowed the Navy to exchange untrained or unwanted men for fully trained and experienced merchant seamen. Although used for the last time in Britain during the Napoleonic War of 1803–15, the right to press men was still retained.

Sometimes even impressment was not enough to secure the numbers of men needed to serve in the Navy when war was imminent. This situation was addressed in view of the Revolutionary War against France, (1793–1801), by the passing of two quota Acts in 1795. Under these Acts a quota of men was to be provided for naval service by each borough and county. High bounties were often used to attract so-called ‘Quota Men’ – something that did not go unnoticed. Thomas Trotter, for example – a leading Royal Navy physician – reflected in his 1819 publication *A Practicable Plan for Manning the Royal Navy* on the exorbitant level of some bounties:

‘the landmen received from their respective parishes, very high bounties; 20, 30 and 40 pounds were common sums; and in one instance £64. The person who received the last sum, was the only man in his

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An engraving from 1790 showing a press gang armed with sabres and bludgeons pressing men on Tower Hill.

parish; he was small in size, had a sickly look, was a tailor by trade, and when he was drafted from the guardship to another ship, was, with some others, brought forward for survey as an invalid, unfit for service.

I asked him what he done with his large bounty? To which he answered, that it was kept for his return home, to set him up in business. Although a poor subject, yet as he might be useful in his employment as a tailor he was retained'.

Undesirables such as criminals, tramps and vagabonds were also often drafted into the Navy to fill such quotas; criminals were given a choice either to go to prison for their misdemeanors or to join the Royal Navy. Those who chose to do the latter were unofficially referred to as 'Lord Mayor's men'.

Joining the Georgian Royal Navy

Such quota men, who were often rated as landsman, were commonly viewed disparagingly as unskilled by service seamen who resented the large bounties they had received. As Trotter reveals:

'the true-bred seamen is a high-minded being. In his lounge or forecastle walk he views the landmen in the waist as an inferior animal, and the latter soon learns to know the depression of the species. The seaman, therefore looks with a jealous eye at every favour conferred on the clod-bopper as done at the expense of his own acquirements. Such as the rankling effects of these exorbitant premiums to the landed volunteers'.

Once wars had ended the need for manpower was not so great; thousands of men were laid off, their services no longer required, and they had no guarantee that they would be employed again by the Royal Navy. For example, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the manning levels of the Navy plummeted from 145,000 to 19,000.

* * *

Up until the mid-19th century life on board ship for ordinary seamen was harsh and dangerous. The cramped and ill-ventilated accommodation was a breeding ground for disease and illness: food and water were spoiled within a few days of leaving shore; and even after the cause of scurvy had been discovered to be lack of vitamin C, the availability of the fresh produce that contained it depended on great ingenuity on the part of the captain and the purser of each ship. There was also a constant wastage of men lost overboard or killed or maimed by falling from the rigging, and that's not to mention the peril involved should the ship be involved in battle. In addition, punishments were numerous and particularly cruel even for the time; the practice of flogging was not suspended in the Navy until 1871, and that suspension was only in place during peacetime. On top of all this, ratings had to endure pay that was generally low and often delayed, sometimes for months and even years. All in all, taking to the sea was by no means an easy way of life.

CHAPTER THREE

CRIMES AND
PUNISHMENTS:
Discipline
in the
Georgian Navy



Before 1652 there was no uniform system for enforcing discipline on board ships at sea; disciplinary offences were instead punished according to a captain's own code of conduct or ancient maritime laws based on the 1336 *Black Book of the Admiralty*. However, in 1652 the Admiralty introduced a naval code of conduct, the Articles of War. This was produced following a heavy defeat by the Dutch at the Battle of Dungeness, which was attributed to the 'baseness of spirit' displayed by its captains and admirals in battle. These Articles of War, revised in 1749 and again in 1757, had the joint aim of preventing indiscipline and cowardice of officers serving in the Royal Navy and establishing a disciplinary code that was not dependent on the inclinations of individual captains, and which could be uniformly applied consistently and fairly.

Enforced by court martial, which could only be convened by a captain who decided whether an offence was punishable, the Articles of War made provision for certain offences, such as profane swearing, drunkenness, uncleanness, striking an officer, disobeying orders, to be punished as decided by a court martial, while more serious offences, such as murder or buggery, could result in a death sentence. These Articles were used as the framework for the Naval Disciplinary Acts enacted in 1661 and 1749. However, although the Articles of War were wide-ranging, they did not cover every possible disciplinary offence or expected behaviour. The Articles were thus supplemented by *Sailing and Fighting Instructions*, first issued in 1673 – the Royal Navy's first publication of this kind – by James, Duke of York (later James II),

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which stressed the importance of maintaining the line in battle. Revised in 1691, it formed the basis of British naval tactics up to 1783. Further guidance was offered by the *Regulations and Instructions Relating to His Majesty's Service at Sea*, which between its introduction in 1731 and 1806 was updated 13 times before a new set of regulations was instituted.

These regulations and instructions, but especially the Articles of War, formed the basis of the Royal Navy's own law and justice system, independent to the law of the land, and was used for its own governance and enforced by those who served in it. The Articles of War were therefore read to a ship's crew – mainly for the benefit of those who were illiterate – when a ship was first commissioned; in place of or at the end of the weekly onboard church service; and when an offender was about to be flogged. A printed copy was also left out prominently displayed for all to see. All of this served as an unequivocal reminder to those serving of what was required in terms of conduct and the associated punishments for any misdemeanour committed.

PUNISHMENTS AT SEA

Any transgressions of these laws were usually dealt with swiftly and often brutally with diverse punishments depending on the severity of the offence. The speed and severity of the penal system served to prevent skulking from affecting general morale, to ensure seamen knew what to expect, and also to avoid the need to keep offenders in confinement – something that was simply not possible on long voyages. In short, the threat of punishment was viewed as necessary in maintaining order and discipline on board Royal Navy ships.

The different types of punishments available to a captain were out of necessity efficient, quick to administer and not disruptive to a ship's routine and operation. For instance, for petty offences, such as swearing or quarrelling, the captain could reprimand a miscreant by temporarily withdrawing privileges, such as the issue of grog (drink consisting of water and rum), cutting rations or putting men in confinement in irons,

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for days or even months at a time. Younger crew members up to the age of 18, such as the boys who assisted the older seamen and carried powder to the guns on a ship during battle (nicknamed 'powder monkeys'), or midshipmen (young men training to become officers), were often reprimanded by caning. This involved them being secured by a rope while bending over a gun carriage and caned with their trousers down. This was traditionally referred to as 'kissing the gunner's daughter'. Depending on the type of misbehaviour they could receive up to a maximum of 12 strokes instantaneously or as a result of a more official hearing. Another punishment for young offenders was to be 'mast headed', whereby offenders were ordered to the top of the mast in inclement weather conditions.

Minor offences, such as laziness, committed by older seamen could be punished arbitrarily by the boatswain's mate 'starting' with a rope's end. Lieutenant Thomas Hodgskin in his *An Essay on Naval Discipline*, published in 1813, describes starting as:

'one man beating another with a piece of rope as hard as he can hit him: the other being perfectly defenceless, and forbid even to look displeased, as that is contempt or disrespect ... Starting is more generally used for want of alacrity than for any other crime. In hoisting the topsails to the mast-head, hoisting boats in and out, hoisting in beer and water, and such like duties, when they are not done with smartness, the captain stationed a boatswain's mate at different parts of the deck, each with a rope's end, with orders to beat every man as he passed ... In performing all the little pieces of duty, every man, almost, as he ran and pulled upon the rope, had to pass ... Thus, whether good or bad, whether old or young, whether exerting himself or not, nearly every man in the ship got a beating'.

Such punishments were not recorded officially, whereas more severe floggings were.

Usually, in cases of theft – a hated crime as it broke the rules of trust between shipmates – the offender, would have to 'run the gauntlet'. In his memoirs, William Robinson (Jack Nastyface), a Battle of Trafalgar

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veteran seaman on board HMS *Revenge*, provides a vivid account of this punishment:

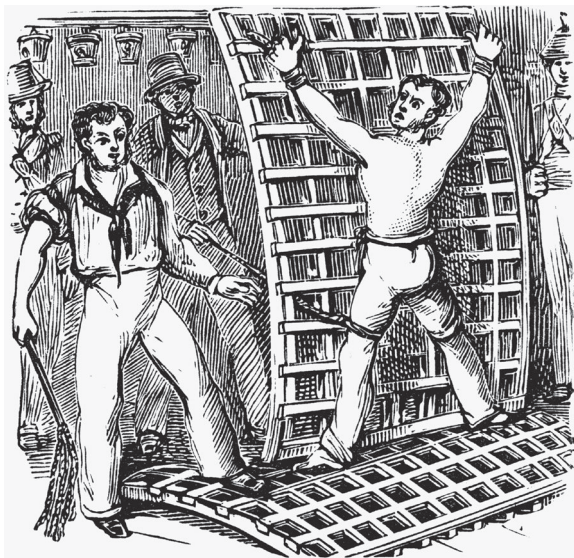
'the criminal is placed with his naked back in a large tub, wherein a seat has been fixed, and his hands lashed down the his sides: this tub is secured on a grating, and is drawn round the decks by the boys, the master-at arms with his drawn sword pointing to the prisoner's breast. The cavalcade starts from the break of the quarter-deck, after the boatswain has given a dozen lashes, and the ship's crew are ranged round the decks in two rows, so that the prisoner passes between them, and each man is provided with a three yarn knettle; that is, three ropes yarns tightly laid together and knotted. With this, each man must cut him, or be thought implicated in the theft'.

This practice was used to reinforce the notion of trust and honour among the ship's crew and potentially act as a deterrent to others, who risked being ostracised as a result of such actions.

The most common form of punishment was flogging. Admiralty regulations stipulated that captains were allowed to authorise floggings of up to 12 lashes without recourse to a court martial. This rule was often overlooked, however, and some captains authorised floggings of up to 72 lashes without a court of enquiry. The infamously sadistic Captain Hugh Pigot, when in command of HMS *Success* from 22 October 1794 to 11 September 1795, ordered 85 floggings totalling 1,272 lashes, in some instances four times the maximum allowed. This equated to half of the crew, and resulted in the deaths of two men from their injuries. By way of comparison, the captain previous to Pigot on HMS *Hermione*, Captain Philip Wilkinson, during the period 25 January to 12 October 1795 authorised just 15 floggings, totalling 408 lashes. Two of these floggings were given to Joseph Thomas and John Stevens for desertion, for which they both received 72 lashes.

Offenders in such circumstances would have their wrists lashed to an upright grating near the gangway on the quarterdeck and be flogged on their bare back by the boatswain with a cat-o'-nine-tails (a whip formed of nine pieces of rope knotted at the ends). This took place in

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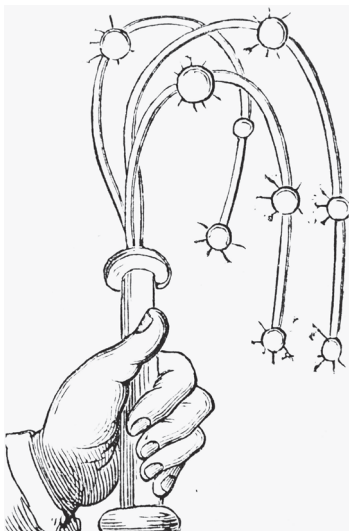


A sailor being flogged while lashed to a grating.

full view of the assembled ship's company and, like 'running the gauntlet', the ritual public humiliation involved was intended to act as a deterrent to others. Samuel Leech describes a flogging of a seaman found to be drunk as follows:

'the executioner throws the cat over his right shoulder ... it is brought down upon ... the shoulders of the man. His flesh creeps, it reddens as if blushing at the indignity; the sufferer groans; lash follows lash; until the first mate, wearied with the cruel employment, give place to a second. Now two dozen of those dreadful lashes have been inflicted: the lacerated back looks inhuman; it resembles roasted meat burnt nearly black before a scorching fire; yet still the lashes fall; the captain continues merciless. Vain are the cries of the wretched man. "I would not forgive the Saviour", was the blasphemous reply of one of these naval demi-gods, or rather

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A cat o' nine tails could inflict appalling injuries.

demi-fiends, to a plea for mercy. The executioners keep on. Four dozen strokes have cut up his flesh, and robbed him of all self-respect; there he hangs a pitied, self-despised groaning bleeding wretch'.

John Wetherell still felt the after-effects of his flogging after considerable lapses in time: 'believe me the shirt on my back was like a butcher's apron, and so still that every time I had to stoop down it would tear off the bladders of blood and water that were on my poor mangled body'.

To some, a flogging was like a death sentence. This was particularly the case for repeat offenders, who had limited healing periods between floggings. One example is Jeremiah Walsh, who was flogged on the orders of Pigot on 4 August 1795 for neglect of duty and received 24 lashes, and then again on 11 September 1795 for drunkenness and contempt with 12 lashes; he died on 30 September 1795. One seaman described the blows by flogging as worse than death:

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'I felt them so keenly, being the first and last time they scratched my back, that I thought I would rather let the rogue that caused what I endured kick me overboard another time, than have those unnatural devil cats at my shoulders'.

Refusal to accept a flogging was often looked upon dimly. For instance, F. Lally, a seaman who in 1759 knocked down a midshipman, having refused a 12-lash flogging went on to be sentenced by court martial to receive 200 instead.

Insolent men were sometimes punished by gagging. William Robinson described the process in his memoirs: 'the man is placed in a sitting position, with both his legs put in irons, and his hands secured behind him, his mouth is then forced open and an iron bolt put across, well secured behind his head. A sentinel is placed over him with his drawn bayonet, and in this situation remains, until the Captain may think proper to release him, or until he is nearly exhausted'.

Other types of punishments included 'ducking', whereby a seaman weighed down by cannon shot was plunged into the sea from the yardarm. Men were also 'spread eagled' on the mizzenmast rigging, or forced to carry a 'wooden collar' (a yoke bearing the weight of multiple cannon balls) or the 'capstan bar' (a heavy beam of wood) for several hours.

TRIAL BY COURT MARTIAL

More serious crimes that potentially could result in a mandatory death sentence or lesser but still severe punishments were dealt with by court martial, as were crimes committed by commissioned or warrant officers; they could not be punished arbitrarily by the captain and, if found guilty, were usually dismissed from the service. Whatever the rank of the offender, the decision to hold a court martial was not taken or entered into lightly.

Once reported by the captain, the decision to proceed (or not) with a court martial rested with the commander-in-chief of the station in which the alleged offence had taken place. From a personal perspective a captain might be reluctant to focus attention on misdemeanours that

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took place on board his ship for fear of questioning by his peers of his reputation and ability, and because of uncertainty about how a case might be judged; decisions could sometimes be clouded by personal jealousies or character clashes or by the inability of officers who were not experienced or legally minded enough to deal with such matters. Also not clear was the type of punishment, if any, that might be meted out, since most of the Articles of War were followed by the caveat that a punishment will be given 'as the court martial shall be judged to deserve' and at the discretion of the officers representing the adjudicating panel. Furthermore, arranging a court martial was a time- and labour-intensive process, particularly if a ship was in the middle of a long voyage far from land and a suitable naval base or establishment.

Having received confirmation from the commander-in-chief, a court martial could only be held if a quorum of at least five and up to 13 senior officers (captains or admirals) could be assembled to decide whether a reported offence contrary to the Articles of War was proven, and what punishment, if any, should be imposed. This in itself could in some cases take months to organise and impact significantly on naval operations, particularly when the accused, the person bringing the charge and any other witnesses, who may have moved to other ships, also had to be summoned. For example, the court martial relating to the mutiny on HMS *Chesterfield* (see page 118) took place nearly eight months after the offence had occurred.

Given the impact that a court martial had on resources and operations it is somewhat surprising that some were ever brought at all. One such seemingly unnecessary case was a court martial in 1715 presided by one admiral and 12 captains that was held to try Richard Everett, carpenter of HMS *Adventure*, on charges of insolent speeches and mutinous behaviour brought against him by the ship's captain, Caleb Wade. A disposition by the ship's lieutenant, Samuel Pitman, recounts a great dispute between Everett and Wade over keeping a fire in their cabins. According to Pitman, the captain told the carpenter he should not keep any fire, to which the carpenter replied that he had as much right to do it as the captain and therefore would keep one. The argument persisted and after 'a great many words' that Pitman did not recollect, Everett said he

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knew as much about naval affairs as the captain and that he was a true fellow and did not value the captain, and told him he intended to inform against him 'for finding of the main geers in the yawse with Mr Carney one of the mates to help rig the navy brigantine for New England and for robbing the Queen's store house'. Another deponent reported that Everett had said he did not care for the captain and had abused him grossly. Having examined the evidence, the court found Everett guilty of the charges as stipulated by the 27th Article of War and sentenced him to be dismissed as carpenter of HMS *Adventure* and 'represent him as a person not fit to be employed as an officer in HM navy for the future'.

In another such seemingly petty case, Commodore Horatio Nelson in 1797 presided over a court martial of Lieutenant Nicholas Meager of HMS *Dromedary* who was charged by the ship's master, George Casey, because he took 'me by the nose and pulled with all his strength' in full view of everyone on deck.

THE ULTIMATE PUNISHMENT

The most severe punishment that could be meted out by court martial was the death sentence. For officers, this was execution by a firing squad, and for seamen by hanging. The sentencing of officers in this way was uncommon but there were some controversial examples, which not only led to direct changes of the Articles of War, but also had tragic repercussions for succeeding officers.

Second Lieutenant Baker Phillips, aged 26, was in 1744 serving on board HMS *Anglesea*, whose captain, Jacob Alton, had been ordered to patrol the English Channel for French ships. On 29 March 1745, HMS *Anglesea* was approached by a ship. This was mistakenly believed to be HMS *Augusta*, so Elton proceeded to his quarters for dinner. Unbeknown to Elton, however, the approaching vessel was actually the French ship *Apollon*. In the ensuing confusion, Elton rashly ordered HMS *Anglesea*'s retreat by shortening the foresail – an action that resulted in the ship being blown to one side and the gun decks being flooded. Taking advantage, the

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Apollon poured a broadside into the distressed HMS *Anglesea*, killing both Elton and the master. This left Baker Phillips, as the most senior officer, in command. After further French broadsides caused 60 more crew to be killed or wounded, and with HMS *Anglesea* listing and unable to return fire, Phillips duly surrendered his ship. After the event, Phillips was subsequently court martialled in 1745 for his conduct and charged under article 10 of the Articles of War which stipulated that:

‘Every Flag Officer, Captain and Commander in the Fleet, who, upon signal or order of fight, or sight of any ship or ships which it may be his duty to engage, or who, upon likelihood of engagement, shall not make the necessary preparations for fight, and shall not in his own person, and according to his place, encourage the inferior officers and men to fight courageously, shall suffer death, or such other punishment, as from the nature and degree of the offence a court-martial shall deem him to deserve; and if any person in the fleet shall treacherously or cowardly yield or cry for quarter, every person so offending, and being convicted thereof by the sentence of a court martial, shall suffer death.’

In failing to prepare his ship to engage, not encouraging the inferior officers and common men to fight courageously, and for surrendering, Phillips was sentenced by the court martial panel of officers to death by firing squad. However, due to the circumstances and because of Phillips’s age and inexperience, they recommended he be shown mercy – a recommendation for clemency that was controversially overturned. The general view of the matter in Parliament was that a higher-ranking officer such as a captain or admiral would have avoided execution and that Phillips had been made a scapegoat for the failings of his captain. The ensuing political fall-out of this case was so great that it eventually resulted in the amendment of the Articles of War, whereby any senior ranking officer who surrendered or did not do their utmost in such circumstances would face execution.

This revision of the Articles was to later play a significant part in the death in 1757, during the Seven Years’ War, of Admiral John Byng, who

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*British admiral John Byng (1704-57) was court-martialled and executed by firing squad on board the *Monarque*, at Spithead, for his failure during the Battle of Minorca.*

was infamously court-martialled and executed by firing squad for failing to do his utmost while in command of a fleet that was ordered to bring support to an English garrison – Fort St Philip at Port Mahon – that was holding out against a French invasion of Minorca, a significant Mediterranean naval base. Having fought an inconclusive action against a French fleet on 9 May 1757 off Minorca, and after a council of war, Byng had decided to leave Minorca and head for Gibraltar to repair his ships, leaving Minorca's fate in French hands.

Aside from the death penalty, one of the most severe punishments for seamen that could be ordered by a court martial was 'flogging round the fleet', during which as many as 1,000 lashes could be given. One unfortunate recipient of this punishment was Thomas Young, a deserter, who was sentenced in 1778 'to receive 300 lashes on his bare back with a cat of nine tails alongside such of His Majesties ships and vessels in port at such times and in such proportions as shall be directed by the commanding officer of the said ships and vessels for the time being'.

CHAPTER FOUR

VICTUALS AND TIME OUT: Food, Drink and Recreation in the Georgian Navy



The significance of the connection between diet and the efficiency and success of the Royal Navy between 1714–1820 cannot be underestimated. Given that this success depended on the energy-sapping manual labour and exertion of tens, and sometimes hundreds of thousands of men, the quantity and quality of food and drink was of paramount significance, particularly considering that a lack of vitamin C in a seaman's diet was the chief factor in scurvy, a disease described as the scourge of the Royal Navy.

Samuel Pepys underlined the importance of food, which he considered to be more important to seamen than pay:

'Englishmen, and more especially seamen, love their bellies above everything else, and therefore it must always be remembered in the management of the victualling of the navy, that make any abatement from them in the quantity or agreeableness of the victuals, is to discourage and provoke them in the tenderest spot, and will sooner render them disgusted with the King's service than any one other hardship that can be put upon them'.

However, the conundrums of what food (victuals) should be provided, how it was sourced, how to ensure its quality, how was it to be transported to ships in home and foreign waters, and once on board, how to keep it fresh when ships could be many months at sea were significant hurdles to overcome.

THE LOGISTICS OF PROVISIONING

Administratively, many of these responsibilities were devolved to the Victualling Board. Prior to 1714, the victualling of the Royal Navy was carried out by private contracts. A surveyor general, along with local surveyors, was appointed in 1665 to check the quality of such provisions. However, this proved to be an unsatisfactory arrangement due to the dissatisfaction of the Royal Navy with the victuals that were supplied. A board of Victualling Commissioners was thus duly appointed in 1683, replacing the Surveyor General, which was subordinate, but independent to, the Navy Board. This new Victualling Board comprised four commissioners and typically a staff of 70 – which increased during wartime – whose responsibility it was to organise and control all the different aspects of victualling the Royal Navy. Based in London, at Tower Hill, the Victualling Board oversaw all contracts for supply of victuals, much of which were made ready and packed at these premises.

Transport ships were hired by the Board, except for during the periods 1690–1724 and 1794–1817. They were still supplied by transport ships but under the administration of a dedicated Transport Board, a responsibility that was assigned to the Transport Board. Depots at Portsmouth, Plymouth, Chatham, Dover, Leith, Cork and Great Yarmouth received delivery of victuals along with yards on foreign stations and ships at sea. Abroad, the oldest yard was at Gibraltar. Outgrowing the facilities at Tower Hill, in 1743 the Victualling Board purchased land at Deptford and moved its victualling yard operations there. In 1787, it relocated its offices to Somerset House. It was finally abolished as an entity 45 years later.

Without the benefit of refrigeration or the techniques of canning foods (both 19th-century developments), or modern preservatives, the Victualling Board depended on traditional food preservation methods such as salting or pickling. Some of the main staples of a seaman's diet were thus salted meat, dried pease (peas) and hard baked biscuit.

Victuals and Time Out



Hard baked biscuits (hard tack).

In 1677, Pepys drew up a victualling contract outlining the daily and weekly ration for each man on board ship. This was set at 1lb (450g) of biscuit and 1 gallon (3.75 litres) of beer each day, with a weekly ration of 8lb (3.6kg) of beef, or 4lb (1.8kg) of beef and 2lb (900g) of bacon or pork, with 2 pints (about 400g) of pease. Sunday–Tuesday and Thursday were meat days. On the remaining weekdays they were served fish (fresh cod, or wind-dried cod or hake) with 2oz (50g) of butter and 4oz (100g) of Suffolk cheese (or two-thirds that amount of Cheddar cheese). Once the allocation of fish had been replaced by oatmeal and sugar by 1733, this specified dietary intake for seamen remained virtually unchanged until the mid-19th century. This perhaps was in part due to the conservative taste of seamen as much as to considerations for their health. As Captain James Cook reported:

‘Every innovation whatever on board ship, though ever so much to the advantage of seamen is sure to meet with their highest disapprobation. Both portable soup and sauerkraut were at first condemned as stuff unfit for human beings. Few commanders have introduced more novelties as useful varieties of food and drink than I have done. It has been in great measure owing to various little deviations from established practice that I have been able to preserve my people from that dreadful distemper, scurvy’.

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However, although the types of dietary rations consumed daily by the Royal Navy remained relatively unchanged, the amounts required fluctuated sharply during peace and wartime in direct proportion to manning levels. The Victualling Board acted on yearly estimates provided by the Admiralty informing then how many men it was expected to feed by supplying detailed accounts of how much this would cost. For example, during a typical year during the Napoleonic Wars, 1797, the cost of feeding 110,000 men was set at £2,758,268.1.10¹/₂ by the Victualling Board. This projected spend was added by the Admiralty to the other running costs of the Royal Navy; known as 'Navy Estimates', these were presented to Parliament for their consideration.

Operationally, the Victualling Board acted on instructions from the Admiralty and the Navy Board to supply individual ships; the Sick and Hurt Board for food provisions for the sick; and the Transport Board (when in existence) to arrange to send victualling ships to provision ships at sea, both home and abroad.

Throughout the 18th century the Victualling Board manufactured and packaged increasing amounts of food and beer at its own victualling manufacturing yards in London, Portsmouth and Plymouth, which was a surer way of ensuring quality. During their busiest times, i.e. wartime, nearly 2,500 tradesmen were employed in such yards, many of them making wooden casks for the packaging of food provisions. This high level of coopering was required because nearly all the food rations were packed in wooden casks in some form or another; meat was salted and placed in brine to preserve its eating longevity, whereas biscuit and bread were kept in canvas or cloth bags. Other activities included brewing beer, slaughtering livestock and packing the meat and baked biscuits, although the Board still resorted to outside contractors to fill any gaps in potential supply due to increased demand in wartime. The proximity of these victualling yards and storehouses to dockyards, particularly at home ports, aided the quicker provisioning of ships.

Abroad, the main victualling yard in the Mediterranean was at Gibraltar, which served a huge operational area some 2,000 miles (3,220km) long and 400 miles (650km) wide, extending to Toulon in the

Victuals and Time Out

west (800 miles/1,300km away), and Egypt in the east (1,800 miles/2,900km away). In many instances it made no operational sense for Royal Navy ships in these waters to make round trips to Gibraltar for provisioning purposes. This obvious operational difficulty was addressed by the Victualling Board, Navy Board, Ordnance Office (supply of armaments), and the Treasury (supplying the Army), when the Transport Board was not in operation, by chartering merchant ships and contracting private owners to arrange collection and delivery of victuals to ships at sea at designated rendezvous points.

A newly commissioned ship, or one returning into service, was provisioned according to where it had been ordered to sail by the Admiralty. If this was in Channel service, it was supplied with three months' supplies, whereas foreign service ships were provisioned for six months. In port, while being fitted out, three days' provisions were issued under an 'extra petty warrant' until the ship set sail, so as not to diminish its seagoing provisions. The sheer scale of the supplies is demonstrated by the list of victuals with which HMS *Victory* was provisioned on 8 December 1796 at Gibraltar: 'Bread, 76054 lbs; wine, 6 pints; vinegar, 135 gallons; beef, 1680 8lb pieces; fresh beef 308 lbs; pork 1921 1/2 4lb pieces; peas 279 3/8 bushels; oatmeal, 1672 gallons; flour, 12315 lbs; malt, 351 lbs; oil, 171 gallons; coals, 80 cauldrons; cask, 117 tuns, 3 hogsheads, 1 puncheon; iron hoops, 428; biscuit bags, 163'.

THE ROLE OF THE PURSER

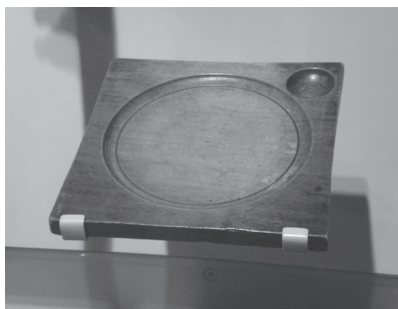
The conduit between the Admiralty, Victualling Board and a ship was the purser. He was responsible for the supply of victuals, as well as the financing of them, and occupied a role partly paid through the Admiralty and partly by a commission on the daily issue of victuals: the purser's pound (in terms of weight) was 140z, whereas victuals obtained from store were calculated based on a pound equating to 160z. Notionally this difference was to cover the purser for any wastages or seepages of victuals, but it was widely perceived as being a means for him to pocket

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any difference. He also kept any profits on certain items, such as clothes, tobacco and bedding, that he could sell to seamen on board, all of which were deducted from the seamen's wages. To obtain his warrant, the purser had to find two people to stand as guarantors before he could be posted to a ship, to cover any outstanding debts he may accrue.

Aside from the accounting of provisions on a 'per man, per day' basis, the purser was also responsible for maintaining the ship's muster and for keeping records of any expenditure on items not supplied by the victualling yards, such as candles, or the wooden utensils seamen used for eating purposes known as 'turneryware', for which he received an allowance of between 14 and 17 pence per lunar month. Moreover, he was to keep records of any defective foodstuffs that were officially condemned as 'not fit for men to eat'. For such a complex and demanding role, and one that could fairly easily be abused for personal gain, it is surprising that prior to 1813 there was no test to assess would-be pursers' suitability for a warrant.

On board ship the responsibility of ensuring that meat supplies were stored properly and watered regularly and that all food (including vegetables) were carefully cleaned and boiled before being served to the crew belonged to the cook. Up until 1806 the only qualifications required to obtain a warrant to become a ship's cook (as opposed to a



A square wooden plate used on board ship.

Victuals and Time Out

captain's cook), was that he was usually to be a Greenwich Chest pensioner, which often meant he was missing a limb. This is documented in a letter by James Cook to the Navy Board in 1768:

'Honourable Gentlemen, I have received your letter ... acquainting me that you have appointed John Thompson, Cook to the Endeavour bark; as this man hath had the misfortune to lose his right hand, I am of opinion that he will be of little service and as I am very desirous of having no one on board but what is fully able to do their duty'.

Ship's cooks therefore had no formal culinary training, instead acquiring their skills through experience of trial and error.

For much of the early 18th century nearly all food was boiled in large pans on brick hearth ovens. By the late 1720s, however, iron fire hearths replaced the brick ovens, which in turn were superseded by the Brodie stove in the 1780s.

THE DAILY ROUTINE

The serving of food and drink were the highlights of a seaman's day, both from a nutritional and recreational point of view. The captain of a ship often set the times and duration of meals – an operational necessity in case of certain ship manoeuvres or emergency. A ship's crew ate together in messes, which varied according to its crew numbers: larger ships, such as HMS *Victory* in 1798 with a ship's crew of 800 plus, had 165 messes. Each mess member would take turns to be a mess cook, which meant preparing and setting the table for his mess mates and collecting the cooked food from the cook by an allocated mess number.

In a typical routine day 45 minutes was usually allowed for breakfast, and for supper and dinner 90 minutes. Meal times were sacrosanct, as highlighted by Edward Riou, captain of HMS *Amazon*, in 1799:

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'the ship's company are never to be interrupted at their meals but on the most pressing occasions and the commanding officer should be very punctual as to their hours of dinner and breakfast'.

William Robinson (Jack Nastyface) recounts in his memoirs the serving of breakfast, which was usually at 8am.

'The meal consists of burgoo, made of coarse oatmeal and water; others will have scotch coffee, which is burnt bread boiled in some water, and sweetened with sugar. This is generally cooked in a hook-pot near the galley, where there is a range. Nearly all the crew have one of these pots, a spoon, and a knife; for these things are indispensable: there are also basons, plates & C, which are kept in each mess, which generally consists of eight persons, whose berth is between two of the guns on the lower deck, where there is a board placed, which swings with the rolling of the ship, and answers for a table'.

The composition of these messes at mealtimes was integral to social life on board. Captain Anslem John Griffiths in his *Observations on Some points of Seamanship with practical hints on Naval Economy* in 1824 reflected: 'the privilege the seamen ... had of changing their messes the first of the month if they fought fit was their Magna Carta'. Moreover, Griffiths used messing arrangements shrewdly to his advantage:

'So satisfied was I with the misery of obliging men to mess together that among my punishments was a drunken dirty, a blackguard and a thieves mess. Instead of being numbered, they were called by these names at the grog tub, the cook's coppers, etc. Experience showed me that a decree placing a man in one of these messes for a given time on account of misconduct had more effect than corporal punishment'.

An astute captain could also use the turnover of mess changes to gauge morale on board his ship: the higher the turnover, the worse the morale.

Victuals and Time Out

The main meal of the day was dinner, which was taken around midday. What was eaten depended on which day of the week it was (see above). However, dinner was the first instance during the day when seamen could have an alcoholic drink, such as beer. Lobscouse was a typical dish served at dinner and consisted of boiled salted meat, onions and pepper (if available) mixed with the ship's biscuit and stewed together. Supper was at 4pm, when a ship's crew was usually served with 'a half pint of wine, or a pint of grog [each] with biscuit and cheese or butter'.

A QUESTION OF CLASS

Although technically there should have been no difference between what officers and seamen ate since they were issued exactly the same rations, prevailing social conditions of the time dictated otherwise. Officers were expected to eat in a better way than the common seamen, referred to by officers as 'the people', because of their status as gentlemen, rank, social class and wealth. This was reinforced by the fact that officers ate at different times from 'the people', in the wardroom or the gunroom, and purchased out of their own pocket luxury foods that were used to supplement their regular diet and wines. In the case of the captain, he had his own cook, captain's servants, china plates, silver cutlery, crystal decanters and linen tablecloths.

The higher the rank, the more lavish the food. For instance, John Guliver, the admiral's steward on board HMS *Prince George* in 1781, kept a menu book for Admiral Robert Digby that records on Friday 27 July that the admiral and his guests – including Prince William Henry (later William IV) – ate a meal comprising: mutton hash, roast mutton, mutton stocks, roast duck, potatoes, butter, ragout cabbages, stewed cauliflower, corn beef, plum pudding, cherry tarts and gooseberry tarts.

BOOSTING RATIONS

In addition to preserved, long-life provisions, Royal Navy ships also carried livestock such as cattle, sheep, pigs, goats, geese, hens and chickens for supplies of fresh meat, milk and eggs. In 1760, for example, HMS *Somerset* departed from Messina with 60 oxen on board. Cattle were supplied by the Royal Navy, but other livestock were bought by the officers and ratings to supplement their rations. The officers did not necessarily keep the best meat for themselves, however: in 1797, Admiral St Vincent ordered that when cattle were slaughtered on ships the officers should only take the head and tongue, leaving the choice cuts for the men, 'he taking a head every slaughtering by way of example'.

Both officers and ratings would take advantage of purchasing 'extras', such as fresh vegetables and fruit. In foreign waters, bumboats would flock to Royal Navy ships to sell local wares; in the Mediterranean, for example, grapes, lemons and oranges would be purchased. Many seamen also fished as a recreational pursuit and in order to add to their diet; exotic fish and wildlife, such as sharks, flying fish, dolphins, porpoises and turtles, were regularly caught and eaten. Birds were also fair game and various attempts were made to trap or shoot them. In 1763, seagulls were shot by officers on HMS *Isis* in Gibraltar.

Although for the most part these additional foods would have been very beneficial and greatly welcomed, sometimes the tasting of local



Rats were frequently found on board Royal Navy ships.

Victuals and Time Out

delicacies resulted in unwanted after-effects, as recorded by HMS *Arab's* surgeon in 1799: 'a number of men poisoned by a mangereen apple ... occasioned severe vomiting and violent convulsions'.

Rats were a common pest on board ships, eating and spoiling provisions and stores. Seamen got their own back by turning the hunting of them into entertainment and subsequently eating them, with reports stating that they made: 'nice and delicate eating ... full as good as rabbits'. Another frequently referred-to pest were weevils (a type of beetle) often found in flour, bread and biscuit supplied to Royal Navy ships. These were harder to eradicate and less good for sport or eating than rats, though this was not for lack of trying: an unsuccessful experiment was carried out in 1813 to eradicate them from flour and biscuit by placing live lobsters in casks containing these supplies. The lobsters were found to have died after several days, whereas the weevils were still alive in numbers.

DRINK, DRUNKENNESS AND DIVERSIONS

The provision of drink was also a highlight of a seaman's day. Water stored in wooden casks became brackish after several days so, to make it drinkable, it was mixed with rum to create grog. From 1740, $\frac{1}{2}$ pint (250ml) of rum diluted by $\frac{1}{4}$ pint (125ml) of water was issued twice a day on board ships. Also from 1740, seamen were issued with 1 gallon (3.8 litres) of beer a day, and more from a communal barrel if required. Drunkenness was, not surprisingly, a severe problem, leading to many accidents and disobedience. In 1813, William Warner, HMS *Ville De Paris's* surgeon, opined that John Mclean had died because he had been drunk constantly for ten days, and went on to lament that: 'drunkenness nowadays in the Navy kills more men than the sword' and that 'most diseases and accidents can be attributed to grog'.

It is possible, indeed likely, that drinking provided an escape from the drudgery of duty and the harshness of life on board, or was simply a means of recreation and entertainment. Drinking spirits probably raised spirits, at least temporarily, and all manner of games and high jinks

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ensued. In 1805, for example, Thomas Simpson, surgeon of HMS *Arethusa*, highlighted the case of John Downie, a man with a:

'ghastly wretched appearance [who could] imitate with the greatest possible exactness the howling of a pack of hounds, the crowing of a cock, the bellowing of a bull, cow or calf and a number of other animals. On account of these curious qualifications he is often solicited by his shipmates to give a specimen of talents and a glass of grog is of course his reward'.

Other forms of recreation were story-telling, singing, listening to music and dancing, as well as the worthy enterprises of practising or learning to read and write. There are various reports of these activities, including a journal entry by the surgeon of HMS *Daphne* in 1819 that mentions 'music and dancing in the evening', while the surgeon of HMS *Maidstone* during 1800–02 noted the beneficial effects on seamen's health of dancing. Robert Mercer Wilson, a Napoleonic war seaman, recorded in his journal, that:

'those who are not employed sewing and mending, you'll see them either learning to read or write, or cyphering, or instructing others ... Others are relating awful stories of what happened in awful times, while their bearers are listening with respectful silence, especially the younger sailors'.

These more wholesome diversions must have played an important role in maintaining the spirits of the men, as well as forging and strengthening bonds of friendship and providing some relief from the stresses and strains of life at sea.

CHAPTER FIVE

KEEPING A
HEALTHY CREW:
Medicine
in the
Georgian Navy



Georgian Royal Navy surgeons at sea between 1714 and 1820 were hampered by the limitations of contemporary medical knowledge. Major breakthroughs in the field, such as the use of anaesthesia, and discoveries such as the role of bacteria in disease, that mosquitoes caused yellow fever, and scurvy was a dietary deficiency caused by a lack of vitamin C, were in some instances more than a century away. Many diseases could not be effectively diagnosed, nor could the available medicines – which today would be banned for being too hazardous – treat or cure them.

Disease, not enemy gunfire, was the greatest threat to the Royal Navy throughout the Napoleonic Wars of 1793–1815; between 1792 and 1815 the Navy employed an annual average of 109,846, of whom on average 3,518 men – one man in 31 – died as a result of disease or accident, while just one man in 403 died in battle. To put this into perspective, more than twice as many men died of disease in a single typical year than were killed (1,483) in total during the Navy's six major victories between 1792 and 1815 (at the battles of Glorious First of June, 1794; Cape St Vincent, 1797; Camperdown, 1797; the Nile, 1798; Copenhagen, 1801; and Trafalgar, 1805).

THE ROLE OF THE SURGEON

Clearly, preserving the health and well-being of the Navy's men was in the Admiralty's interest, from both a fighting efficiency and economic point of view. Understanding how to keep serving men healthy and making use of the best medical practices meant, importantly, that ships could stay at sea

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longer – for instance, on exploration missions or maintaining blockades of enemy ports far from victualling Royal Naval stations. Health was therefore considered as important as the fighting qualities of its men and ships – a sentiment summed up by Vice Admiral Nelson: ‘the great thing in all military service is health; and you will agree with me that it is easier for an officer to keep his men healthy, than for a physician to cure them’.

The responsibility of maintaining the health of everybody on board Royal Navy ships belonged to the surgeon. Most surgeons received their medical training in Scottish universities, principally those in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. Those who did not attend university served apprenticeships with a practising surgeon ashore, supplementing this with university courses, or by attending lectures by eminent surgeons, or else by observing and assisting in hospitals, familiarising themselves with how patients were treated. What could not be learned in formal education establishments was gleaned from books written by leading Royal Navy surgeons, for instance Thomas Trotter’s *Medicina Nautica* (1799); James Lind’s *A Treatise of the Scurvy* (1753); and Gilbert Blane’s *Observations on the Diseases of Seamen* (1785). From 1800, aspiring surgeons had to pass a ‘viva voce’ examination set by the Royal College of Surgeons to test the extent of their medical knowledge with regard to anatomy, surgery and diseases. If a candidate was successful, the college would advise the Royal Navy as to the rate of ship and capacity in which the candidate should be employed – usually as a surgeon’s mate in various classed levels, or in exceptional circumstances as a surgeon – before they could be warranted to ships by the Navy Board. Admiralty regulations stipulated that surgeons had to provide appropriate medical instruments and medicine chests, which the Royal College of Surgeons checked before each voyage. From 1805, however, medicines were provided free to surgeons.

LIFE AS AN ONBOARD SURGEON

Surgeons were the only medical officers on board ships, although they were sometimes assisted by a surgeon’s mate serving a form of

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apprenticeship. The surgeon's role combined many of those carried out ashore by surgeons, physicians, and apothecaries: they had to treat any medical ailment that presented itself aboard, including those of a dental and mental nature. As well as carrying out their medical rounds at least twice a day, and caring for the sick, from 1806, they were also obliged by the Admiralty to keep a journal recording the: 'general history of the prevailing complaints in the ship; and if any malignant or infectious disease shall have existed to trace their source, and to account for their introduction, stating the means used to destroy the infection and prevent its reappearance'.

It could be argued that no amount of education or training could have prepared surgeons for some of the diseases prevalent at sea, which would have stretched to their very limits the medical knowledge and ability of even the best surgeons ashore. In many instances, their efforts were futile: diseases such as scurvy, typhus and yellow fever proved fatal in many cases as they incapacitated many and severely reduced the Royal Navy's fighting efficiency.

THE SCOURGE OF SCURVY

Incidences of scurvy-like symptoms were first recorded by Hippocrates, 'the father of medicine', as early as the 5th century BC. No solution was found, however, and later major voyages of exploration led by the famous Portuguese explorers Vasco da Gama (1497–99, resulting in the discovery of India), and Ferdinand Magellan (who led an expedition to the East Indies from 1519–22), were ravaged by outbreaks of scurvy. In fact, so severe was the disease that da Gama lost more half of his crew of 170, while Magellan lost a staggering 208 of his crew of 230.

Little wonder, then, that a solution was eagerly sought, and how fortunate that when it came it was very simple. Da Gama had already noted that the consumption of citrus fruits had provided some relief from the symptoms and protection against the spread of scurvy, and this was reiterated by Hawkins in his book *The Observations of Sir Richard Hawkins, knight, in his voyage into the South Sea in the year 1593*, published

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in 1622. In it, Hawkins – an experienced Royal Navy admiral – states clearly the benefits of citrus fruits when used as a preventative against scurvy and iterates how critical it would be if this information were recorded and disseminated for his country's benefit:

‘[what] I have seen most fruitful for this sickness is sour oranges and lemons ... I wish that some learned man would write of it, for it is the plague of the sea, and the spoil of mariners. Doubtless, it would be a meritorious work with God and man, and most beneficial for our country; for in twenty years, since that I have used the sea, I dare take upon me to give account of ten thousand consumed with the disease’.

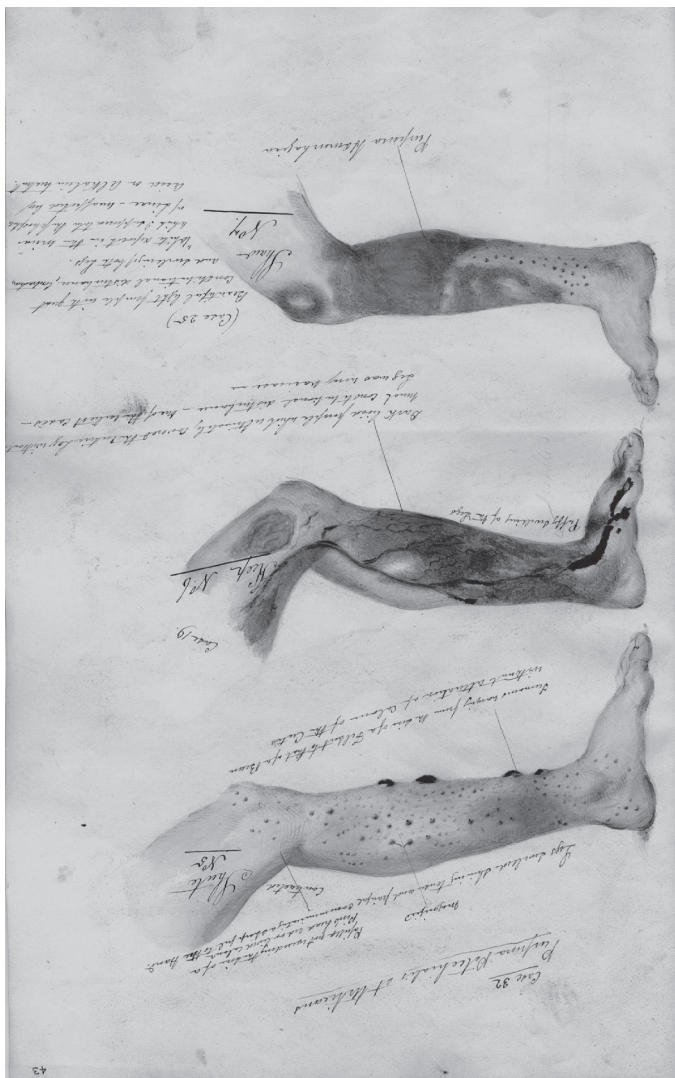
The success of citrus fruits (specifically lemon juice) against scurvy was further demonstrated by the voyage of James Lancaster on behalf of the East India Company to the East Indies from 1601 to 1603. Three of the four ship's crews that were part of this mission were devastated by scurvy just four months after leaving England, while his crew on board the *Red Dragon*, in comparison, kept good health due to Lancaster issuing them daily with ‘three spoonfuls of bottled lemon juice’.

In his 1671 manual, *The Surgeon's Mate*, for surgeons serving at sea, John Woodall, surgeon general to the East India Company, outlines remedies for scurvy on land and at sea as follows:

‘We have in our own country here many excellent remedies ... namely, scurvy-grass, horse-radish roots, nasturtia aquatic, wormwood, sorrel and many other good means ... [to cure] those which live at home ... they also help some sea-men returned from far who by the only natural disposition of the fresh air and amendment of diet, nature herself in effect does the cure without other help ... [at sea] the lemons, limes, tamarinds, oranges and other choice of good helps in the Indies ... do far exceed any that can be carried thither from England’.

So, although the prevention of scurvy was known during the 17th century, no one had made a link to it being a dietary deficiency until

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The severe effects of scurvy on a sailor's leg as observed by ship's surgeon Dr Mahon on a later voyage.

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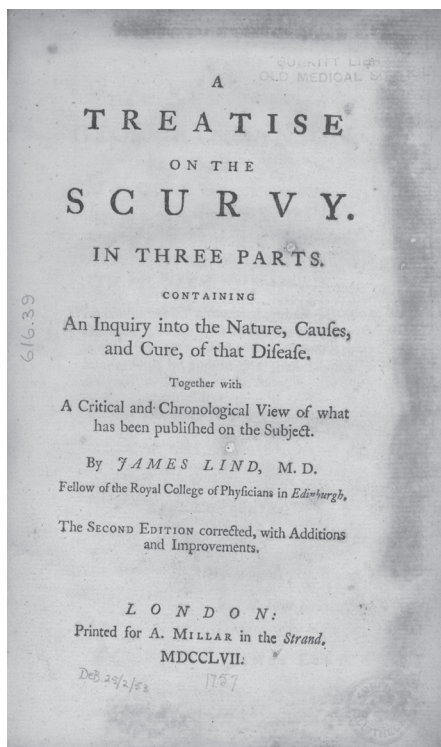
more than 150 years later. This, coupled with issues surrounding the supply and procurement of such citrus fruits and the problem of storing and keeping them fresh on board ship, further compounded the problem for the Royal Navy.

Meanwhile, scurvy continued to be a scourge to Royal Navy operations and its men. Hundreds of thousands of men died as a result of the disease, experiencing symptoms of swollen bleeding gums; fetid breath; skin discoloration; lassitude; fatigue; nose bleeds; leg and joint pains; weight loss; shortness of breath; convulsions; shivering; trembling; and changes in mental state, ranging from idiotism, lunacy and dreadful anxiety, the onset of which could appear rapidly two months into a long voyage.

The deadly effects of scurvy were firmly brought home by Captain George Anson's circumnavigation of the world from 1740 to 1744. Anson's fleet consisted of six Royal Navy ships and two merchant ships, on which served 1,955 men. Only one-third of the crew survived. Of those who died, many had succumbed to scurvy. This huge and tragic loss of life provided the impetus to find a cure.

One of the men who attempted to do just this was James Lind, who wrote the famous *Treatise on Scurvy*, published in 1753, and dedicated it to Anson. Lind, a Scottish physician, had joined the Royal Navy as a surgeon's mate in 1739. By 1747, he was the surgeon on HMS *Salisbury*, where he undertook what was reputed to be the first clinically controlled experiment on scurvy when there was an outbreak among the crew. Dividing 12 sick seamen into pairs, Lind gave them different dietary supplements and observed their progress, reporting that 'the most sudden and visible good effects were perceived from the use of oranges and lemons'. Despite this marked effect, however, Lind did not make clear the definite link between citrus fruits and scurvy, instead claiming that poor diet, bad air and confinement were equal causes. Moreover, Lind in his attempts to address the question of transportation and storage decided to boil the fruits into a concentrate, thereby destroying the vitamin C content and greatly reducing the fruits' effectiveness. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the Admiralty did not take any immediate action when presented with these results.

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The frontispiece of James Lind's 1753 Treatise on Scurvy.

Scurvy continued to take its toll. Reported casualty figures from 1760, during the Seven Years' War (1756–63), indicate that out of 184,899 seamen, 1,512 were killed in action, while a colossal 133,708 were 'lost', and that scurvy was the chief factor in this total.

The turning point was the success of Captain James Cook's circumnavigation of the world from 1768–71, during which only one man was lost to scurvy. Although the crew's diet was reliant on sauerkraut and malt, scurvy cases were treated with orange and lemon

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juice. This remarkable outcome perhaps highlighted the scurvy issue again for the Admiralty's attention, and renewed efforts were made to address the appalling situation. For instance, notable naval medical officers, such as Sir Gilbert Blane and Thomas Trotter, led the way in persuading and convincing the Admiralty to issue lemon juice to all seamen. Eventually this recommendation was decreed in 1795, when Blane was appointed as commissioner to the Admiralty Board.

YELLOW FEVER AND TYPHUS

Aside from scurvy, the most deadly diseases that surgeons had to deal with were yellow fever, particularly in tropical climates, and in colder climates, typhus.

The journal of HMS *Alfred's* surgeon, W. J. Warner, reveals the onset of yellow fever which appeared a week after the ship had arrived in Jamaica in mid-July 1796: 'more than 200 persons sent from the *Alfred* [to Port Royal hospital with the disease] 'not a third survived the third day'. Warner thought the outbreak had been caused by some crew

'clearing a prize, on ... which, were thirty persons, confined to bed, others were at the same time employed to fit out the Malabar, newly arrived from St Nicholas, where she buried most of the officers and crew of a malignant fever'.

Warner graphically describes the disease's symptoms as:

'prostration of strength, heavy, sometimes acute pain of the forehead, a severe pain of the loins, joints and extremities, a glacy appearance of with a bloody suffusion of the eye, nausea, or vomiting of bilious, sometimes offensive black matter ... the countenance flushed at other times, pale and dejected with oppressive cold sweating, bleeding at the nostrils, the pulse sometimes for a short period full and quick, but more frequently languid, great thirst, the tongue white and brown at the edge, frequently covered with a white slimy

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matter, and as the fever advanced, became dry, brown and crusted, a fatal appearance in general ... towards the close of the disorder, a small red rash appeared on the skin, and soon disappeared, leaving livid spots where it had shown itself, and was always a fatal sign'.

Warner then explains the uncertainty among medical officers about the causes of yellow fever, including the opinion of 'Doctor Allenby [who] ... thinks the complaint proceeds from redundancy of bile, or indigested matter, which if not evacuated soon becomes vitiated, and produces the direful symptoms mentioned', and the best methods of treatment. Calomel (a derivative of mercury, poisonous in high or multiple doses) was ignored as he was 'not bold enough to give it the trial as recommended'; strong spruce beer was dismissed as ineffective – '13 cases on board HMS *Dictator* treated with this beer, 10 died'; and bloodletting, thought to cure or prevent disease based on the medical theory that blood and other bodily fluids were 'humors which needed to be balanced to maintain health', was also not trusted as it was 'an uncertain and perhaps dangerous experiment' and naval surgeons who used this treatment revealed that 'extreme debility followed, and death soon' after. Warner instead extols the merits of Doctor James's Fever products, camphor (lethal in high doses), castile soap and rhubarb, and, having succumbed to yellow fever himself 'rhabard pul, calomel, sapon venet in pill form ... followed by Good madeira ... and my common drink ... an infusion of tamarinds with a small glass of brandy to a quart'.

Typhus, also known as, 'camp', 'gaol' or 'ship' fever, is an infectious mainly cold-weather disease, chiefly spread by lice in dirty clothes, in overcrowded, cramped and filthy conditions. Typical common symptoms are fever, rash, headache and sores that lead to delirium, then a coma, and death if left untreated.

Virulent typhus epidemics hit Royal Navy war mobilisation efforts in 1739–40, resulting in 25,000 men falling ill under its effects, 2,570 deaths, and 1,965 desertions from hospital of those carrying the disease. In 1756, more than 2,000 men died as a result of the disease. Although many officers attempted to keep their ships clean, which reduced the

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risk of typhus, seamen were not issued standard uniforms (slops) until 1857. Prior to this, clothes were bought from the purser on board ship who would charge the costs against their wages. Bearing in mind the different climates and damp conditions that seamen had to work in, this requirement for clothing was an important and perhaps expensive consideration, which was sometimes baulked at.

Sir Gilbert Blane, physician to the fleet, 1789, recounts some of the issues faced in this respect:

‘A true seaman is in general cleanly, but the greater part of men in a ship of war, require a degree of compulsion ... such is the depravity of many, that it is not uncommon for them to dispose of their clothes for money to purchase spirituous liquors’.

OTHER DISEASES

Sexually transmitted diseases were also an endemic problem for the Royal Navy particularly when ships were in port. Prostitutes who flocked to ships when in harbour were unable to protect themselves medically from such diseases, as the costs of contraception, which was rare, and for medical treatments, if obtainable, were prohibitively high for both the average woman and man. This problem was probably exacerbated by the fact that seamen with venereal disease had to pay the ship's surgeon 15 shillings in order to receive treatment – a sum that amounted to much of his monthly wage. This cost acted as a deterrent and many men opted not to take this course of action, or indeed sought self-help methods. This was certainly the case of John Squires, who was recorded in the 1802 journal of Samuel Allen, surgeon of HMS *Albion*, as being included on the sick list thanks to swollen testicles following Squire's failed attempt to medicate himself with a strong injection of chemicals to stop the effects of gonorrhoea.

Surgeons, too, occasionally resorted to unconventional methods to treat medical cases, some of which proved fatal, whereas others saved

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lives. In his journal, HMS *Atlas*'s surgeon John Duke recounts being called on 20 October 1819 to attend John Baker, a prisoner with pneumonia:

'of a most severe and aggravated form ... I found him restless and impatient, sometimes violent and raving, respiration difficult and labourious ... I immediately abstracted 50 ounces of blood which brought a syncope (loss of consciousness), and seemed to have relieved him'.

At 10.30pm Duke was called again to Baker to find him:

'in a dangerous state ... insensible ... His respiration was hurried and sterterous, his features astonishingly shrunk, and his face and neck covered with a cold and clammy perspiration ... 20 ounces of blood was immediately abstracted ... which again brought on syncope'.

Having extracted the equivalent of 3½ pints (1.75 litres) of blood in several hours Duke records that Baker died around 2.15am.

By contrast, Ben Lara, the surgeon of HMS *Princess Royal*, recounts an amazing lifesaving account of James Callaway, seaman, aged 40, through the ingenious use of tobacco smoke. On 19 January 1802, the apparent corpse of Callaway was brought on board. The story goes that Callaway:

'had fallen over the bows of the launch which passed over him ... another boat endeavouring to assist also drove him under water. He emerged and was again sinking when dragged into the boat. He was about 12 minutes in the water and 20 more elapsed before he was brought on board. He was stripped, laid on a warm bed ... and rubbed dry with coarse cloths warmed. He was rubbed with dry salt and some heated was applied in a cloth to the scrob cord. He proceeded in this mode for a quarter of an hour without effect ... Being compelled to relinquish the advantage of the galley ... he was removed into the bay – here on a warm bed, bottles with

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hot water, were put under his hams, armpits and to the feet, pewter plates heated and defended with flannel were placed along the spine. Tobacco smoke was conveyed to the lungs through the tube of a common pipe. In three quarters of an hour from his removal into the bay, I observed an obscure palpitation of the heart – the tobacco smoke was urged – In ten minutes from this he sighed faintly and closed his mouth. The smoke was continued – he coughed, pulse at the wrist was evident – we desisted from using the smoke he coughed repeatedly – in an hour and 20 minutes from his being brought on board – he spoke – and then swallowed about two tea spoonfuls of brandy and water. In four hours from our first applications he was perfectly collected’.

ONBOARD SURGERY

One of the most common operations performed by Royal Navy surgeons was amputation. John Atkins, naval surgeon, describes the technique used for amputating a limb while the patient was still awake, without any modern-day pain relief, though sometimes sedated with laudanum (an opium derivative) or grog:

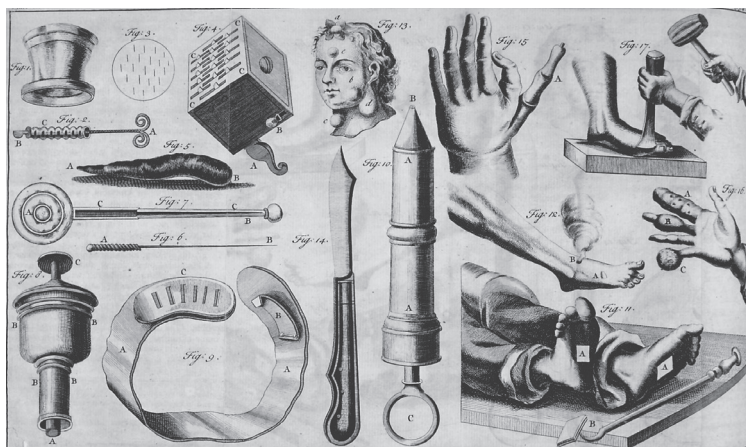
‘Thus ready, your patient should be placed on a stool; both that he may be supported behind, and that the assistance about you may be more commodiously used. We begin by fixing the tourniquet. And for this purpose, having drawn the muscles taut upwards, we enfold the thigh or arm with a thick linen compress ... Besides these we fasten two other tape ligatures at the very place we are to make the amputation, leaving only room between them for the knife to go round. The use of these is to swell the flesh to the knife, and to guide it for a smooth circumcision which you are now to make, bringing it at once as near the bone as you can, and as far round. What is wanted of a complete circular incision, you are to supply with another stroke of the knife or catlin; with which also you are to separate the flesh from between the fociis, and clear it for the saw.

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The saw is to be set on both bones at once, (if two) and divided at as few strokes as possible, taking heed in the division that the nearer you come through, the easier to move, lest the bones should splinter'.

After an amputation the wound needed to be closed and the bleeding stemmed. This was usually done with a needle and thread and applied ligatures or with a hot iron or pitch tar. Although they were often accused of incompetence, most surgeons could amputate a limb in under two minutes.

One of the most advanced surgical interventions that a naval surgeon performed was trepanning. This procedure involved making a hole in a patient's skull either by drilling or cutting using a sharp implement to scrape away layers of bone. One recipient of trepanning was John Fisher, a landsman on HMS *Carron* who was wounded on the 'superior part of the head from a grape shot which fractured both parital bones' on 15 September 1814. Remarkably, Fisher survived and was discharged to HMS *Childers* on 28 October 1814 for a passage home to England.



A range of the kind of instruments available to the Georgian ship's surgeon.

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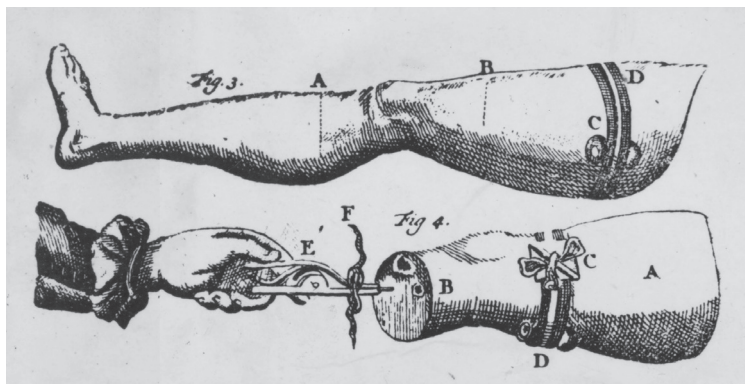


Diagram showing a technique for a leg amputation.

For all the success stories and tales of survival, however, many thousands of men died at sea, whether from diseases that were as yet incurable, infection following surgery or as the result of injury, or incompetence on the part of the ship's surgeon. Furthermore, the poor conditions and dietary deficiencies often had a ruinous effect on the longer-term health of seamen, whose life expectancy was commonly curtailed. The psychological impact of life at sea could also take its toll, with madness and depression being often-cited causes of desertion, suicide, violence and other criminal acts both on board and after a voyage had ended, although little was understood about these mental maladies during the Georgian period. Whichever way you look at it, then, surviving conditions in the Georgian Navy would have been tough, and in many cases down to pure luck. That said, Haslar wasn't established as a lunatic asylum until the 19th century and maladies of the mind weren't really understood, although their effects were definitely noted.

CHAPTER SIX

A MATTER OF SURVIVAL: Storms, Shipwreck and Fire on Board Ship



Throughout 1714–1820 the main cause in the loss of Royal Navy ships, more so than losses in battle, was shipwreck, through foundering, accidental causes or as a result of storms. For example, during the five wars in which Britain was involved between 1739 and 1815, the Royal Navy lost a total of 1,027 ships. Of this total, 568 ships (59 per cent), were lost as a result of foundering (161 ships, 15 per cent), shipwreck (407 ships, 39 per cent), and (53 ships 5 per cent) due to accidental burning, collision or mutiny.

The reasons for shipwrecks ranged from carelessness to poor navigation, ships undertaking operations too close to shore, storms or poor weather conditions, inaccurate or incomplete charts, or accident.

In some instances Royal Navy ships just disappeared mysteriously with no account of their loss as there were no survivors or any witnesses to provide testimony. One such case was HMS *Hazard*, commanded by Roger Green, which was wrecked on 12 October 1714 while sailing to Boston, carrying mail and despatches, in poor weather in Massachusetts Bay. Although there were no survivors, remarkably, much of the mail that was being carried was salvaged.

AT THE MERCY OF THE ELEMENTS

One of the worst shipping disasters in Royal Navy history was caused by a hurricane in September 1782 off Jamaica with the loss of 3,500 men. HMS *Ramillies* and HMS *Centaur* were part of a fleet under the command

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of Rear Admiral Graves, including several French prizes, HMS *Glorieux* and HMS *Ville De Paris* (the former flagship of the Comte de Grasse), captured at the Battle of the Saintes (12 April 1782). When a major storm struck the fleet during 16–19 September, both ships were lost on consecutive days with just one survivor. Several accompanying merchant ships were also lost, including the *Dutton*, *British Queen*, *Withywood*, *Rodney*, *Ann*, *Minerva* and *Mentor*. In a letter to the Admiralty dated 29 November 1782, Capt Sylverius Moriarty provides a vivid account of the effects of the storm and the loss of his ship, HMS *Ramillies*:

*‘The evening of Monday 16th of September gave every indication of a gale of wind. In consequence every preparation was made ... both for the safety of the ship and that the convoy may follow the example ... the wind increased and blew strongly from the SE with a very heavy sea. Between 3 and 4 of the morning of the 17th flew about to the NNW and without a lull took us by the lee, blowing a most violent hurricane. The main mast went by the board, the mizzen mast halfway up, the foremast over the starboard bow, the foreyard broke in the slings, the rudder almost tore off from the sternpost, the tiller snapped in two. In this distressed situation I ordered [the] Lieutenants ... to examine the state of the ship below and to continue with the people at the pumps ... Lieutenant Nash, Turnball the master and myself, under the direction of Admiral Graves, gave orders to [encourage] the people to get clear of the wreck ... The exertions were great and were effected expeditiously. The morning ... presents, O God, a most awful and affecting view, every species of sea distress surrounded us. A ship under our lee ... was lying on her side, apparently waterlogged, her ensign was hoisted, they first cut away the mizzen mast and made an effort to wear her, then her mainmast, in attempting the foremast she went down suddenly by the head, the fly of her ensign was the last thing we saw of her ... I was told by the carpenter and Lieutenants at the pumps that the *Ramillies* had six feet [of] water in the hold and that the pumps would not free her, that the water ways worked all the oakum out, and that her beams amidships almost worked out of the clamps. On which I ordered all the ... officers to attend in freeing the ship. We set the spritsail on the foremast and a main top gallant sail on the*

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stump of the mizzen mast and bore up before the winds and kept bailing and pumping the whole of the 17th without gaining anything materially on the ship. The officers came to me in a body and said there was an absolute necessity to relieve the ship by throwing the guns overboard. The admiral, observing that the Ramillies was the only protection that remained to the convoy, with reluctance consented to have the forecastle and aftermost quarterdeck guns thrown overboard. We soon got clear of them and of a great quantity of shot and other articles of little consequence.

[During] the night of the 17th, or 18th by the log, all hands were employed bailing and pumping, seven foot water in the hold and blowing very hard from the westward. The officers informed me that the ballast getting into the pumpwell rendered the whole of their pumps useless, in this exigency there was nothing left than bailing. In the morning saw nothing of the Canada ... that had opened considerably in the night, the officers again made application to me to have the upper deck guns thrown overboard, the admiral again with reluctance to have the foremost and three of the aftermost guns on the main deck with the remainder of the quarterdeck guns except two thrown overboard which was soon effected. The ship opening very much, we nailed tarred canvas and hides all fore and aft from under the cells of the ports on the main deck to the fifth plank from the waterways ... The same was done on the lower deck ... The complaints of the ship were now so alarming that it became necessary to get clear all the upper deck guns, the shot on the upper and lower decks were hove overboard with several heavy stores. A leak in the light room of the grand magazine almost filled the forward. Eight foot water in the magazine; the exertions were great; every gentleman on the ship took his turn at the whips or handling the buckets ... by close of the day we gained on the ship considerably by the officers' accounts by the carpenters very little; this gave the Admiral and me some hopes we would still be able to save her. In the course of the night the ship strained much and gained on us to 7 foot. Still blowing hard with very heavy squalls, the ship in all appearance settling forward. In the morning of the 19th the officers came to me in a body to say the ship complained still more, and its being reported to the admiral he

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consented to cut away both bowers, which was soon accomplished. All the junk went overboard, one sheet and one small bower cable were cut into junk and thrown over and every heavy store we could lay hold of. All the powder in the magazine forward being damaged was thrown overboard; the cutter and pinnace were stove and got clear of, every person in the ship bailing ... As it moderated a little Mr Turnbull, whose knowledge and exertions were conspicuous, with Mr Ravenscraft were getting everything ready for heaving the lower deck guns over board ... It was resolved to throw everything overboard that could in the least relieve her. I begged the Admiral to go on board one of the vessels in company and save his life that was valuable to the country, but he obstinately refused it, saying that living a few years longer was of very little consequence and that leaving the ship in the situation she was in would discourage the people.

It lulled considerably in the night all hands bailing 6ft fore and aft. In the morning of the 20th cut away the spare and stream anchors ... In the course of the day got clear of the lower deck guns. As the strengths of the ship's company was quite exhausted I ordered one half of them to the bailing, the other to take a little rest, in hopes as everything we could possibly think of was done for the ship we may be able to swim her to England. To my sorrow she gained and considerably this night, though there was but little wind ... at three [in] the morning of the 21 the officers, ships company and carpenters came to me saying it was impossible to keep her above water. I informed the admiral of that melancholy circumstance, who at last came to a determination to take the people out of her and divide them among the merchant men. Early on the morning of the 21st we made the signal to the merchantmen to take the people agreeable to an arrangement made the previous evening, got out remaining boats and what bread we had on the quarterdeck ready to send with the people. At 9 the admiral left us ... I used every effort to send the people away, dividing the officers who had my particular orders to deliver them to the first man of war or tender they met with. ... Between three and four of the afternoon got most of the people away ... I had the pleasure to observe the punctuality obedience, sobriety and attention of the ship's company to the last moment. If there was a

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possibility of saving the ship, the unremitted exertions of the officers would have accomplished it. At half past four I left the Ramillies with the 1st and 3rd Lieuts and every individual that remained except Mr Young to whom I gave orders to set fire to her ... She burned very rapidly [and] blew up and sunk before I reached the Augustus Caesar where Captain Fowler received 52 people and myself with that politeness and humanity that particularly distinguish that gentleman'.

One of the worst Georgian Royal Navy shipping disasters recorded to have been caused by a storm on British shores occurred on 5 October 1744 when HMS *Victory* – commanded by Samuel Faulknor and described in her day as the ‘finest ship in the world’ – was wrecked at the Caskets, near Alderney, with the loss of all 1,150 men on board. It is claimed that distress gun signals were heard on the island of Alderney, in the Channel Islands, but no one could identify their source owing to the raging storm.

FOUNDERING AND FOUL PLAY

Another major disaster occurred on 29 August 1782 when HMS *Royal George* sank while at anchor in Spithead undergoing repairs. The capsizing of this vessel resulted in the loss of 800 lives, including many women (some of them prostitutes) and Admiral Richard Kempenfelt, together with 400 bibles – the first-ever donation by the Naval and Military Bible Society, which had been intended to spread Christian knowledge and to inculcate the reformation of manners. At the court martial investigating the loss on 9 September 1782 – the findings of which were suppressed by the Admiralty at the time – Admiral Milbank submitted evidence that he had given the ship ‘very constant attendance, saw her opened and asked many questions; and found her so bad [rotten] that I do not recollect there was a sound timber in the opening’. The court duly found: ‘from the short space of time between the alarm being given and the sinking of the ship, that some material part of her frame gave way, which can only be accounted for by the general state of the decay of her timbers’.

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As part of the process, a survivor of the capsizing, James Ingram, seaman, provided a harrowing insight to what happened:

'the water then rushed in at nearly all the ports of the larboard side of the lower gun-deck, and I said to Carroll "Ned, lay hold of the ring-bolt and jump out of the port. The ship is sinking and we shall all be drowned". He laid hold of the ring-bolt and jumped out at the port into the sea. I believe he was drowned, for I never saw him afterwards. I immediately got out at the same port ... when I had done so I saw the port was a full of heads as it could cram, all trying to get out. I caught hold of the best bower anchor, which was just above me, to prevent falling back into the port, and seized hold of a woman who was trying to get out of the same port, I dragged her out ... when I was about half way up to the top of the water I put my right hand on a man that was nearly exhausted ... he tried to grapple me, and put his four fingers in my right shoe, alongside the outer edge of my foot. I succeeded in kicking my shoe off, and putting my hand on his shoulder I shoved him away. I then rose to the surface of the water ... I got the tar about my hand and face but I struck it away as well as I could, and when my head came above water I heard the cannon ashore firing for distress.'

A significant factor that could add to the chaos surrounding a ship in distressing circumstances such as those described above was the belief that if a ship was going to sink, all the regulations of service at sea ended, together with the captain's and officers' authority. This breakdown in authority was tantamount to mutiny and such acts of insubordination often interfered with rescue attempts and resulted in the loss of life, as highlighted by the remarkable story of the shipwrecking of HMS *Wager* and the ensuing mutiny of parts of its crew.

HMS *Wager*, commanded by David Cheap, was one of the ships taking part in Anson's circumnavigation of the world. On board was 17-year-old midshipman John Byron (later to be known as 'foul weather Jack' as a result of his unfortunate experiences at sea) and gunner John Bulkeley, who described how the ship was wrecked off the coast of Chile in 1741 after it had been separated from the rest of the squadron rounding Cape Horn:

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‘Thursday 14 May 1741, at half past four this morning, the ship struck abaft on a sunken rock, founded fourteen fathom; but it being impossible to let go of the anchor time enough to bring her up, being surrounded on every side with rocks (a very dismal prospect to behold!), the ship struck a second time, which broke the head of the tiller; so that we were obliged to steer her with the main and foresheets, by easing off one, and hauling aft the other, as she came to, or fell off. In a short time, she struck, bilged and grounded, between two small islands, where providence directed us to such a place as we could save our lives’.

The situation soon descended into chaos, part of the crew having struggled ashore while others remained on the stricken ship. Here, according to John Byron,

‘they fell to beating everything to pieces that fell in the way, and, carrying their intemperance to the greatest excess, broke open chests and cabins for plunder that could be of no use to them; and so earnest were they in this wantonness of theft, that one man had evidently been murdered, on account of some division of the spoil, or for the sake of the share that fell to him, having all the marks of a strangled corpse’.

Circumstances turned for the worse ashore when Captain Cheap, attempting to assert his authority over the mutineers, shot Midshipman Henry Cozens in the face, fatally wounding him. After five months on Wager Island the 81 mutineers, led by John Bulkeley, left the captain and those loyal to him (including Byron) on the island using the ship’s extended longboat named the *Speedwell* and a cutter, planning to sail to England through the Straits of Magellan. After an arduous, harrowing, 15-week journey covering 2,000 miles (3,200km), only 30 of Bulkeley’s party arrived in Rio Grande, Brazil, in January 1742.

Meanwhile, Captain Cheap, Byron and another 18 men made an attempt to reach an inhabited part of Chile on the ship’s barge, but failed and were forced to return to Wager Island. The expedition was costly, resulting in the loss of seven men, four of these being marines who were

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tragically abandoned to fend for themselves. Of the remaining 13 men, one died of starvation and the health of the others was deteriorating, with Captain Cheap close to death. It was at this point that, miraculously, the 12 survivors were found by a party of Indians, who after negotiations and the trading of the ship's barge agreed to guide Cheap's group to the village of Castro in Chile – a trip that took four months to complete. Only four men survived the journey, including Byron and Cheap.

Eventually, Bulkeley's party arrived back in England in early 1743, via Rio and Lisbon, and Cheap and Byron made it home in 1746, following a stay in a Spanish prison. Surprisingly, the court martial into the loss of HMS *Wager* did not bring any charges of mutiny, possibly on the basis of Cheap fearing a murder charge.

THE FURY OF FIRE

The risk of accidental fire was also a perennial concern on board ships made of wood and bearing large quantities of combustible materials, such as gunpowder. Once a fire took hold it was very difficult to stop owing to the cramped conditions and, to make matters worse, guns that were often left loaded would be set off, resulting in them firing shots unpredictably and hampering any rescue attempts. The horrifying loss of HMS *Ajax* on 14 February 1807 – a ship that had previously taken part in the Battle of Trafalgar – with the loss of nearly 250 men, including many Trafalgar veterans, serves to highlight the ravages of fire, as recounted by an officer who witnessed her destruction:

'At half past nine [in] the evening, the Ajax took fire in the bread room, and in ten minutes she was in a general blaze from stern to stern; the wind blew fresh from the N.E. which prevented the boats of the ships to leeward from rendering any assistance; but from those to windward, and near her, she was well enough supplied to save upwards of 400 of her people and those may consider themselves as most providentially preserved; as it had blown a gale all the day, and for two or three days before, and fell moderate

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towards the evening – a continuance of the gale would probably have rendered all assistance impossible. The fire, it appears, had been for some time (comparatively speaking), alight in the bread room before the alarm was given; for when the first Lieutenant, and many others, broke open the door of the Surgeon's cabin, the after bulk head was burst down by the accumulated flames and smoke abaft it, and so rapidly made its progress through the cockpit, that it was with difficulty he could regain the ladder, and most of those who accompanied him were suffocated in the attempt. On reaching the quarterdeck he found the fire had out-run him, and Captain Blackwood agreeing with that she was past all remedy, they both ran forward where the majority of the people were assembled, calling most piteously on their God for that help they despaired of getting, although many boats were approaching them, so rapidly did the fire work its way forward, and leapt from the sprit-sail-yard, when the Canopus's boat fortunately picked them up. At this time the boats were assembling under the ship's bows, and saved most who still clung to them, though many, naked, benumbed with cold, and pressed on by others, let go their hold and perished, as did everyone who imprudently on the first alarm jumped overboard. The boats, however, cleared her bows, though many of them were in imminent danger of swamping, from the number of the poor creatures who were clinging to the gunwales, and who were obliged to be forced off, and left to perish, for the safety of the rest. The ship burnt all night, and drifted on the Island of Tenedos, where she blew up at five next morning, with a most awful explosion ... The Gunner, unhappy father! Had thrown one child overboard, which was saved; but going down for another, perished in the flames ... One woman, out of three, saved herself by following her husband with a child in his arms down a rope from the jib-boom-end ... Several of the people died after they were got on board the different ships, the rest are distributed among the squadron'.

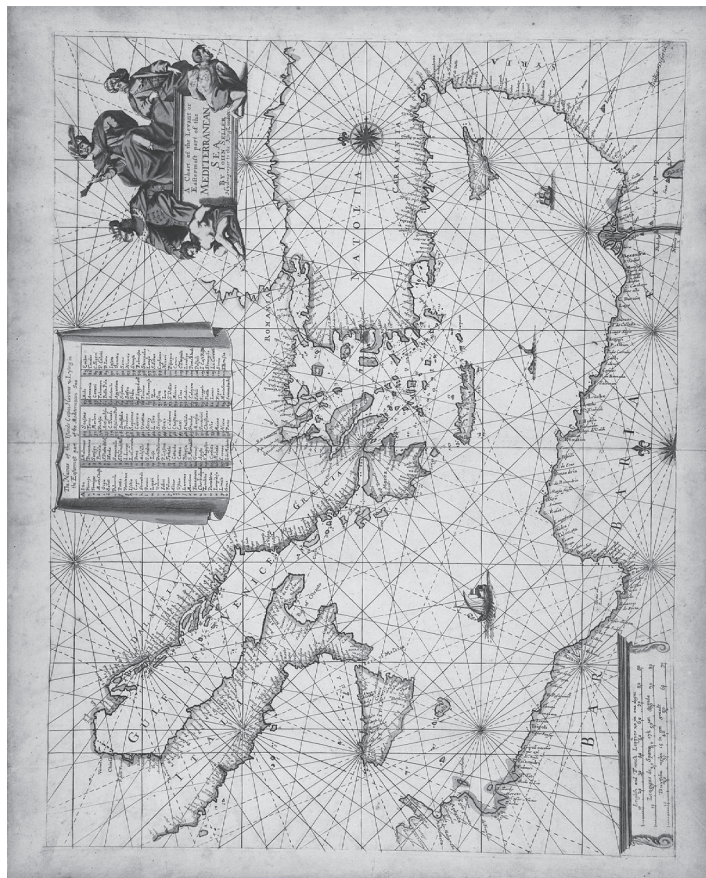
CHAPTER SEVEN

VENTURING INTO
THE UNKNOWN:
Exploration and
Science in the
Georgian Navy



From the early 18th century, many European countries were involved in a race to prove the existence of fabled lands such as the Terra Australis Incognita, the ‘unknown Southern Land’, or to venture into, explore and chart undiscovered seas and territories of the world. Such knowledge was highly sought after, not only on the grounds of national prestige, but also because it offered opportunities to expand existing colonial empires in the continuing struggle of imperial rivalries between Britain, Spain, Holland and France. Whichever nation made new discoveries of land was also best placed to exploit them for potential colonisation, and develop new trading markets in newly found exotic goods and natural resources. Substantial financial inducements were therefore offered by the British government for such discoveries. In 1745 and 1775, for example, a £20,000 prize was offered to whoever discovered the Northwest Passage, a sea route connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, which tantalisingly offered an alternative to the existing perilous course round South America and considerably shortening ships’ journeys.

During the 18th century, ‘the Age of the Enlightenment’, there was a growing confidence that ‘Science’ would resolve enigmas, such as whether there was a Great Southern Continent, and would add to the human understanding of the world. Central to these endeavours of discovery were the naval forces of the European countries that were deployed in voyages of circumnavigation and expeditions to the Americas, Australia, East Indies, Far East, and the Arctic and Antarctic.



Map of the Eastern Mediterranean from John Seller's Atlas Maritimus, 1698.



Map of the Scilly Isles, 1707.

SCIENCE AND THE ROYAL NAVY

In Britain, the Royal Navy was pivotal in advancing scientific knowledge and the practical side of exploration. The first voyage undertaken by the Royal Navy purely for scientific research was led by Edmond Halley (1656–1742), today renowned for the comet named after him, but who was also the Astronomer Royal from 1720 to 1742 at Greenwich Observatory. Completed in 1676, the observatory had been founded by King Charles II so that the Astronomer Royal would ‘apply himself with the most exact care and diligence to the rectifying of the tables of the motions of the heavens, and the places of the fixed stars, so as to find out the so much desired longitude of places for the perfecting of the art of navigation’. Although scientific navigation instruments such as the quadrant and later the sextant were developed to improve maritime navigation, there was still an urgent requirement for an instrument that would keep precise time for establishing an accurate position at sea in all sea-going conditions. To this end, the Commissioners for the Discovery of the Longitude at Sea (commonly known as the Board of Longitude), founded by an Act of Parliament in 1714, offered a £20,000 reward for a solution to this problem.

In 1698, Halley was appointed captain of HMS *Paramour* and ordered to sail to America (specifically the North and South Atlantic), to observe and test the conditions of terrestrial magnetism. Following his voyage in 1701, Halley produced two significant works of scientific value: *A New and Correct Chart of the Whole World showing the Variations of the Compass as they were found in the year 1700* and the *New Sea Chart of the Western and Southern Ocean*. His work on *Variations of the Compass* was the first to show isogonic lines, which connect equal variation of compass points on a chart, and is heralded as a landmark in cartography and navigation. Although from a scientific perspective Halley’s voyage was successful, it was tempered at a practical level by his status as a ‘scientist’, which caused him to experience difficulties with the ship’s officers, who allegedly refused to obey his orders. This insubordination eventually culminated in their courts martial, at which the principal charges were dismissed and

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Naval officer using an octant. These instruments were used to find a ship's latitude by measuring the angle between the horizon and a celestial body, such as the Sun.

subsequently established the precedent that Royal Navy ships, even on scientific voyages, should only be commanded by Royal Navy officers.

In Britain, the forerunner of the promotion of scientific research was the Royal Society. Its membership, known as fellows, comprised the foremost scientists of the day and its status as the national society dedicated to the promotion of science was recognised in a royal charter by King Charles II in 1662. From its foundation, the Royal Society, supported by royal patronage, maintained a close but independent relationship with the monarchy, State and the Royal Navy, becoming the leading organisation from which the monarchy and the State sought advice on scientific matters.

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Although the bond between the Royal Society and the Royal Navy may not appear obvious, an example of the strong link between them can be traced in the Society's own periodical, *Philosophical Transactions*, published in 1665 and 1666, which featured guidelines by Lawrence Rooke, one of its founders, entitled *Directions for seamen bound for far voyages*. These 'directions' outlined the type of data that ships on voyages of discovery should collate in 'exact diaries' for the advance of science, and ranged from compass readings, tidal data, meteorological observations, depths of oceans and coastal waters, plots and charts of coasts, to details of any extraordinary celestial phenomena witnessed. These recommendations were adopted by the Admiralty, and its officers were expected to maintain and return these diaries, known as 'remark books', along with their logs on the completion of such voyages to the Lord High Admiral, the king and to Trinity House to be studied by Royal Society members. The connection between the Royal Society and the Royal Navy was further reinforced by joint organisation of expeditions, and the fact that Samuel Pepys was the Society's president between (1684–86) and an active member of it until he died in 1703, and Halley was its secretary from 1713–21.

VOYAGES OF DISCOVERY

Throughout the 18th century, Britain continued to send Royal Navy expeditions with the dual aims of scientific discovery and material benefits. Although primarily remembered for the capture off the Philippines on 20 June 1743 of the Spanish treasure ship the *Nuestra Senora de Covadonga*, whose treasure was valued at around £500,000 when it was triumphantly paraded in London, George Anson's circumnavigation of the world proved to be the most celebrated voyage of its kind since Sir Francis Drake's (the first Briton to circumnavigate the world) in the *Golden Hind* in the 16th century. Anson's achievements were extraordinary considering the harrowing levels of scurvy that affected his expedition, and the fact that many of his men had previously been Greenwich hospital pensioners. As a commodore in 1740 and with

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Britain at war with Spain and France, Anson was appointed to command a squadron of six ships with orders to harry Spanish possessions and to capture one of the Spanish treasure ships known to sail annually across the Pacific Ocean between Acapulco, Mexico and Manila. By the time he had captured the treasure ship only one of his six ships, HMS *Centurion*, remained in force. Returning home, of the 1,939 crew manning his ships only four had been killed in combat but more than 1,300 had died due to disease, predominately scurvy.

Anson's return increased speculation that the Pacific could supply Britain with new lucrative trading possibilities and imperial conquests, but the existing hazardous route round Cape Horn coupled with the Spanish grip of South America made this a daunting prospect. An alternative route to the Pacific via the Northwest passage over North America could prove to be the answer. To this end, in Anson's absence a Royal Navy expedition was led by Christopher Middleton, a Royal Society fellow, in 1741–42, but failed to find a route having been blocked by ice at the Wager Inlet. Further expeditions of discovery following Anson's success were subsequently mothballed so as not to antagonise Spain after the end of the Seven Years' War (1756–63). The official report of Anson's voyage, published in 1748 and featuring more than 40 charts, provided valuable information for further expeditions of a scientific and surveying nature. Moreover, Anson's circumnavigation of the globe proved to be a valuable experience for later celebrated naval commanders and explorers including Augustus Keppel and John Campbell, who served with Anson on HMS *Centurion*, and John Byron on HMS *Wager*, another of Anson's ships.

Following the end of war in 1763, Britain's interest in the Pacific and the search for the Terra Australis Incognita intensified. Byron in 1764 was duly commissioned to lead a secret expedition comprising two ships, HMS *Dolphin* and HMS *Tamar*, to search for the supposed Southern continent, with the additional aim of establishing a British base in the South Atlantic Ocean, at Pepys Island, reputedly discovered in 1683. Byron was unsuccessful, declaring Pepys Island a 'phantom island'. However, he did locate the Falkland Islands, remarking they could

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‘receive the whole navy of England, which might lie here in the greatest security’, and went on to claim the islands for Britain, unaware that Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811) had already claimed them for France. Returning home, Byron’s ships stopped at the South American archipelago Tierra del Fuego meeting the indigenous nomadic communities – who believed them to be the ‘giants’ described by the great famous Portuguese explorer Magellan – and the Juan Fernandez Islands, home to the castaway Alexander Selkirk, the inspiration for Robinson Crusoe. With his crews suffering from scurvy, Byron attempted to land at some inhospitable atolls, which he named the Islands of Disappointment, but was later to take on fresh supplies and water at other atolls, naming them Coral Island, King George Island and Prince of Wales Island. In July 1765, Byron and his crew reached the island of Nikunau, becoming the first Europeans to make contact with the natives who lived there. Passing the Tuamotus Islands, Byron speculated that this might be the outer reaches of the Southern Continent.

Although not successful in its immediate goals, Byron’s expedition set a record for the fastest circumnavigation of the globe for its time, just under two years, and was the first commander to do so without losing a ship. Moreover, the knowledge he gained about the trade winds across the Pacific, the world’s largest ocean, and the route he took laid the foundations for similar future voyages to be more predictable and scientific in nature.

The Royal Navy acted on Byron’s findings almost immediately following his return home, appointing Captain Samuel Wallis to HMS *Dolphin*, which Byron had used, and Captain Philip Carteret, who had previously served with Byron, to HMS *Swallow* in 1766, to again search for the mythical Southern Continent. In the Magellan Straits, the two ships parted with Wallis taking a north-west direction, leading him to discover many new islands, including Tahiti, which he named King George’s Island, and increasing speculation that the Southern Continent had been finally found. Having chartered the positions of these islands he returned to England in May 1768. Wallis’s circumnavigation was noteworthy for its low incidence of scurvy, and the discovery of Tahiti, which was to be key to James Cook’s first famous voyages of discovery (1768–71).

MAPPING THE SOLAR SYSTEM

One of the oldest scientific mysteries to be resolved concerned the size of the Solar System. By the mid-18th century, astronomers knew six planets orbited the Sun, as well as their relative range from the Sun and Earth, but exact distances were unknown. The potential answer to this enigma was a rare astrological phenomenon called the 'transit of Venus', which could be viewed by telescope as a small black disk travelling across the Sun. In 1716, Halley developed an earlier theory by James Gregory, in his work *Optica Promota*, that by recording Venus's transit at various times at different locations around the world astronomers could determine the distance to Venus using the principles of parallax, and thereby accurately deduce the scale of the Solar System. However, Halley noted that this rare phenomenon occurred every 243 years, with pairs of transits eight years apart separated by long intervals of 121 and 105 years. The next transits were to take place in 1761 and 1769, and thereafter in 1874.

The Royal Society in 1767 formed a Transit of Venus Committee, which identified the North Cape (Norway), Hudson Bay (Canada) or a suitable Pacific site as being the best spots from which to view the next transit. This fortuitously coincided with Wallis's return and discovery of Tahiti, the perfect Pacific location from which to view the transit of Venus. In February 1768, the Royal Society petitioned King George III for £4,000 to fund the expedition and the Admiralty to provide a ship for a scientific expedition to observe the 1769 transit. This was not without precedent, since a similar collaborative international scientific effort had been made in 1761 involving 120 observers from nine countries at 62 different locations, which had failed.

Given that the next transit would be in 1874, the Royal Society was anxious not to squander this opportunity and pressed for the expedition to go ahead, with the result that it was duly given royal approval. The Royal Society's choice to lead the British expedition was Alexander Dalrymple, a fellow of the Royal Society and a respected Scottish geographer and civilian explorer who was the main proponent of the

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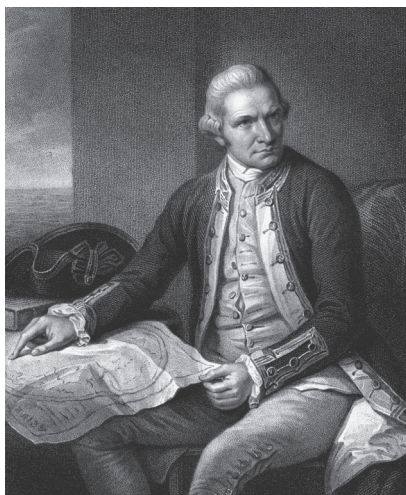
theory that an undiscovered continent existed in the South Pacific – something that he postulated in his book *Historical Collection of the Several Voyages and Discoveries in the South Pacific Ocean* in 1770–71. However, the Admiralty refused this choice, partly because Dalrymple insisted he wanted complete management of the ship to be used in the expedition, which could potentially have caused a repeat of the troubles experienced by Halley in the Royal Navy's first scientific expedition of 1698–1701.

The Admiralty instead identified James Cook (1728–79) as the ideal candidate to lead the expedition. Fortunately for Cook, he was an acceptable choice to the Royal Society, due in part to the fact he had had a paper published in their *Philosophical Transactions* of 1767, which set out his observations of a solar eclipse on the Burgeo Islands off Newfoundland's South Coast.

Cook, born in Marton of Cleveland, Yorkshire, was from a humble background and his formative seagoing experiences were spent in the North Sea coaling trade. He joined the Royal Navy in 1755, and in 1757 passed his examination for the rank of master, qualifying him to sail a Royal Navy ship. During 1757–67 he learned, developed and practised astronomy, hydrographic surveying and cartography while serving in North America. The quality of his work was noticed in powerful and influential places; Lord Colville wrote to the Admiralty in 1762: 'that from my experience of Mr Cook's Genius and capacity I think him well qualified for the work he has performed, and for greater undertakings of the same kind'.

Although the observation of the transit of Venus was the primary focus of the 1769 scientific mission, Cook under the pretext of scientific discovery was also secretly ordered by the Admiralty to search for signs of Terra Australis Incognita. Cook was duly appointed in command of HMS *Endeavour* on 25 May 1768, a ship provided by the Admiralty, and passed his lieutenancy examination on 13 May 1768. The Royal Society's influence on the voyage was conspicuous in the ship's complement of 94, with the appointments of Charles Green, the astronomer, and the wealthy Joseph Banks – elected to the Royal Society in 1766 – who was designated the official botanist. Banks in turn funded Daniel Solander, a Swedish naturalist; Herman Spöring a Finnish explorer, draughtsman,

Venturing into the Unknown



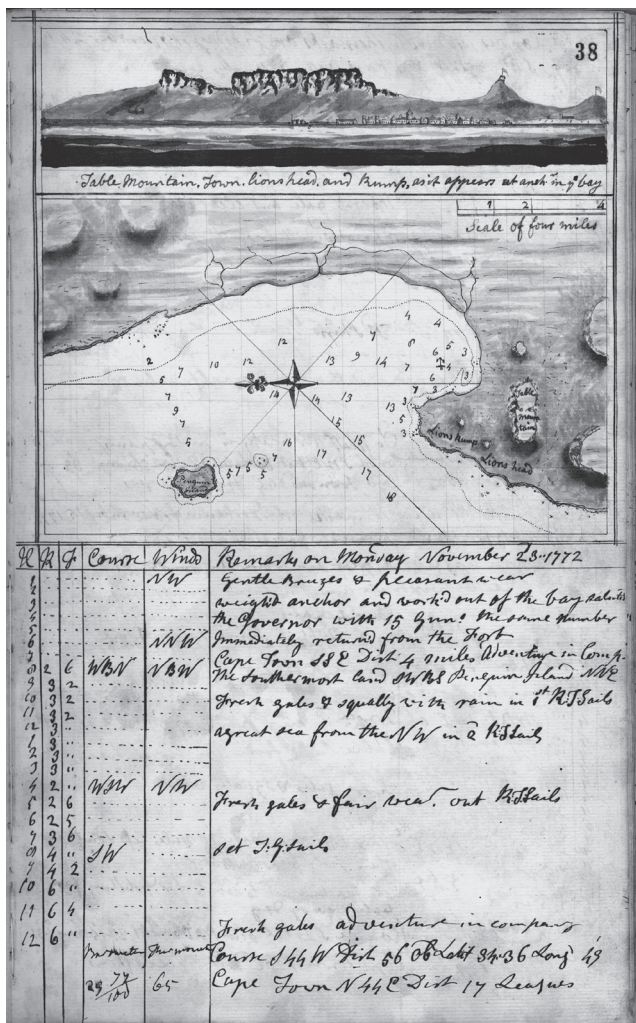
Captain James Cook

botanist and naturalist; and two artists, Alexander Buchan and Sydney Parkinson to join him on the voyage. To maximise the possibility of the mission's success the Royal Society also provided the best scientific astronomical instruments of the day.

Cook was tasked with making the observations of the transit of Venus in Tahiti. HMS *Endeavour* thus sailed from Plymouth on 26 August 1768, reaching Tahiti on 13 April 1769, nearly two months ahead of the transit, with the loss of six crew, and very few men sick. This gave ample time for the ship's company to absorb the beauty of Tahiti, but also to build and set up a portable observatory, known as Fort Venus, near Matavai Bay, to view the transit. Cook described the transit, which occurred on 3 June 1769, in his log:

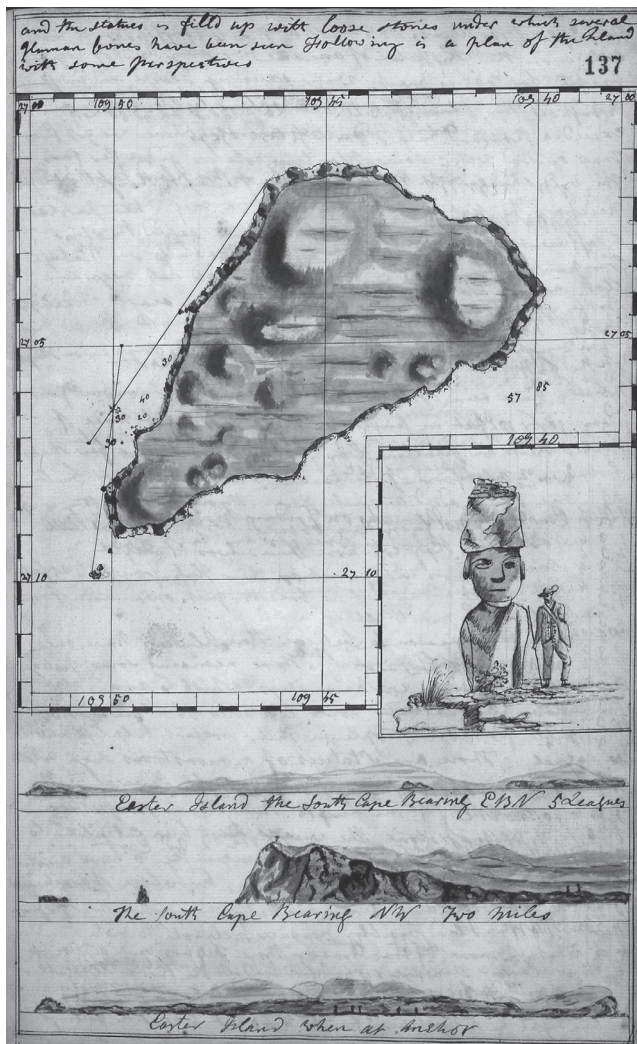
'This day prov'd as favourable to our purpose as we could wish, not a cloud was to be seen the whole day and the Air was perfectly clear, so that we had every advantage we could desire in Observing the whole of the

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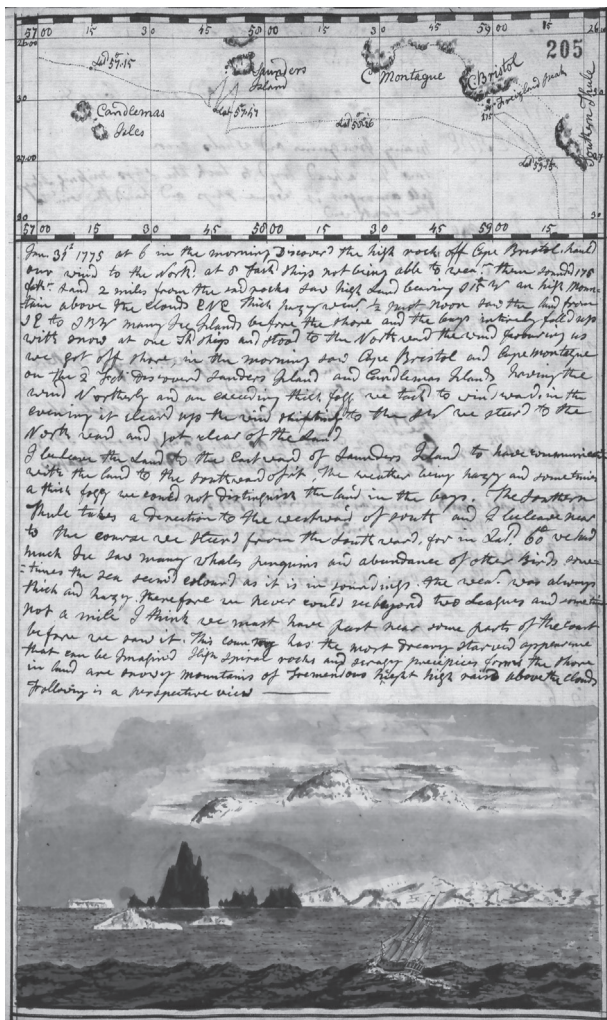
Page from a log of Cook's Resolution's 1772-75 voyage showing Table Bay in Cape Town in 1772.

Venturing into the Unknown



Page from a log of Cook's Resolution's 1772-75 voyage showing Easter Island.

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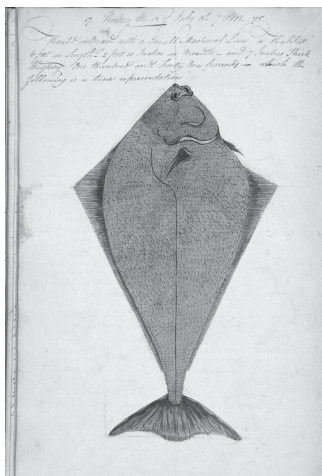


Page from a log of Cook's Resolution's 1772-75 voyage showing the Christmas Isles and Saunders Island.

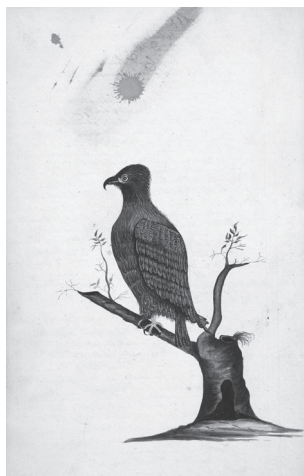
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passage of the Planet Venus over the Suns disk: we very distinctly saw an Atmosphere or dusky shade round the body of the Planet which very much disturbed the times of the Contact particularly the two internal ones. Dr Solander observed as well as Mr Green and my self, and we differ'd from one another in observing the times of the Contacts much more than could be expected. Mr Greens Telescope and mine were of the same Magnifying power but that of [the] Dr was greater than ours'.

Following Cook's return to England in 1771, his astronomical observations were quickly overshadowed by his achievements in circumnavigating the globe, charting 5,000 miles (8,000km) of previously unknown coastlines, including New Zealand, establishing that it comprised two islands, and the eastern coast of Australia, which Cook named 'New South Wales', claiming it for Britain. Banks and



Sketch of a halibut from a 1789-91 log kept by Captain James Colnett who had served under Captain Cook on his second expedition.



Sketch of a large bird (not identified but parrot-like in appearance) from a log kept by Captain James Colnett on a 1789-91 voyage.

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Solander also had great success, having returned with a prodigious number of new species of plants, fish, birds and insects.

The transit observations that Cook, Green, and Solander each used to calculate the Sun's distance differed significantly when compared individually and with the combined results of the other missions owing to a 'black drop effect'. These variations were believed originally to be due to Venus's thick atmosphere but more recently because of turbulence in Earth's atmosphere. Remarkably, Cook's observations have been found to differ from accepted modern values by less than 1 per cent. In 1771, the British scientist, Thomas Hornsby used Cook's observations to calculate that the mean distance of the Earth from the Sun was 93,726,900 English miles (150,839,000km). Today, radar has measured the mean distance to be 92,955,000 miles (150,000,000km) – a testament to the incredible accuracy of Cook's work.

ADVENTURES IN THE POLAR REGION

Cook's trailblazing efforts led the way for later famous Royal Navy explorers such as Arthur Philip, George Vancouver and Matthew Flinders. However, although his successes bolstered efforts to find a solution to the Northwest Passage, the last remaining unknown part of the globe, they also somewhat eclipsed the first Royal Navy scientific polar expedition attempt.

A north polar route towards the riches of the Indies had been advocated since the 16th century, and Dutch and English ships' voyages towards this region had resulted in the discovery of Spitzbergen and a profitable European whaling industry. However, the seas and potential territories north of Spitzbergen remained unexplored due to the hazards of ice. This was something the noted French explorer Bougainville wanted to address after he had circumnavigated the world from 1766 to 1769, on the basis of contemporary scientific thought, which postulated that there would be less ice in the open polar sea than near land. Bougainville thus sought to get French state financial backing for an expedition to this area

Venturing into the Unknown

in 1772, but without success. The Royal Society, learning of Bougainville's rejected proposal, approached him as an existing Society fellow to send his proposed plans to London for the furthering of scientific knowledge. The Royal Society then petitioned Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty, who laid before King George III a proposal for an expedition towards the North Pole in early 1773, which the King directed should be undertaken immediately. This mission was the 'first purely geographical Arctic expedition ... in intention, a purely scientific mission'.

Commodore Constantine John Phipps (1744–92) was appointed to lead the expedition on board HMS *Racehorse* and Captain Skeffington Lutwidge (1737–1814) was appointed to HMS *Carcass*. The ships' hulls were both fortified to break through the expected ice and were supplied with boats large enough to transport the crews in case the ships were wrecked, along with a supply of bricks and mortar to build a retreat should this happen. Because of the expected colder climes, different foods were supplied than usual, for instance portable soup, and appropriate clothing: each crew member received 'two flannel jackets, cotton shirts, cotton handkerchiefs, two lined fearnought jackets, two lined inside waistcoats, two milled yarn caps, one pair of boots, two pairs of boot stockings, two pairs of fearnought trousers and twelve pairs of mittens'.

The expedition sailed on 4 June 1773 from Little Nore, England. During the voyage, scientific trials were made of new timekeepers to fix longitude as well as of Doctor Irving's apparatus for distilling fresh water from the sea. The expedition reached Spitzbergen on 28 June 1773, but was trapped in ice on 30 July 1773. Plans were made to abandon the ships and escape in boats but, fortunately, the ice that had frozen the ships in broke up on 8 August and they managed to escape. The ships returned to Deptford, England and were paid off on 14 October 1773. The expedition had failed in its main objective but in the way it was supplied and in its scientific investigative nature paved the way for later polar explorers, such as Sir William Edward Parry. The expedition is also noted for a 15-year-old Horatio Nelson, who was serving on HMS *Carcass*, having a near fatal encounter with a polar bear.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A NAVY AT WAR:
Sea Battles
in the
Georgian Era



Britain was at war for 49 years during the period 1714–1820. In this time, disease was the biggest killer of those who served in the Royal Navy. Despite this, though infrequent, battles at sea were the definitive test of the organisation, discipline, training and efficiency of Royal Navy crews and the most hazardous immediate peril a seaman could face.

To ensure that a ship was manned at optimum levels around the clock to exercise sailing manoeuvres and be on watch against any potential hazards or engagement with the enemy, many of the crew would be split into two watches (or possibly three), which would alternate. A typical day (noon to noon) would consist of eight hours of watch duty, one hour each for breakfast, dinner and supper, four hours of drill exercises or maintenance duties, five hours for leisure and four hours for sleep.

Samuel Leech, a seaman who joined the Royal Navy in 1812, when Britain was at war with America, describes the organisation and discipline of a Royal Navy ship:

‘This community is governed by laws peculiar to itself: it is arranged and divided in a manner suitable to its circumstances. Hence, when its members first come together, each one is assigned his respective station and duty ... Each task has its man, and each man his place. A ship contains a set of human machinery, in which every man is a wheel, a band, or a crank, all moving with wonderful regularity and precision to the will of its machinist – the all-powerful captain’.

SHIP'S RATINGS

In battle, the most important assets available to a captain were his crew and the ship's guns. From the late 17th century, the potential number of guns (cannons) ships carried took precedence in ship design, with as much space as possible given to their placement on board. The significance of a ship's armament was further highlighted by the classification of Royal Navy ships by rates, based on the number of guns they were armed with. From the mid-18th century, six rates of ships were used in this regard: first-rate ships were the largest, with three decks armed with a minimum of 100 guns; second-rate ships also had three decks and 84–100 guns; third-rate ships had two decks and mounted 70–84 guns; fourth-rate ships had two decks and were armed with 50–70 guns; fifth-rate ships had a single gun deck and were armed with 32–50 guns; and a sixth-rate ship mounted anything up to 32 guns.

The first four rates were considered fit to serve in a line of battle, although this did not apply to fourth-rate ships towards the end of the 1700s. The fifth- and sixth-rate ships were faster sailing vessels known as frigates. The fifth-rate ships in particular were considered the 'eyes of the fleet', searching for and gathering, often independently, intelligence about the whereabouts of enemy fleets and ships. The Royal Navy also deployed a variety of other ships, including sloops, bomb vessels, fire ships and gunboats. Although the rated ships were categorised by the number of the guns they carried, they were also armed with other weapons, such as carronades. The guns on board ship were referred to by the weight of shot they fired, for instance 32 or 24 pounders.

In battle, the success of Britain's Royal Navy fleets largely depended on its captains' fighting tactics, excellent and courageous seamanship, and the accuracy of its gunfire (broadside). This is highlighted by the low ship losses suffered by the Royal Navy in battle. In the five major wars that Britain was involved in between 1739 and 1815, the Royal Navy lost a total of 1,027 ships. Of this total, 324 were captured (31.5 per cent), and only 82 were lost in action, less than 8 per cent of the sum total.

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The repeated battle successes of the Royal Navy were extolled by the French, who said ‘the habit of conquering ... makes them [the British] engage in battle with enthusiasm and courage, which men accustomed to defeats and severe losses cannot have’.

ENGAGING THE SPANISH

Time after time such qualities were displayed by the Royal Navy in action, a trend that can be traced to the first naval fleet action of 1714–1820, the Battle of Cape Passaro, 31 July 1718. Tensions between Britain and Spain had been rising in the lead-up to this battle. Britain on 2 August 1718 had joined an alliance consisting of France, Austria, Holland that demanded that Spain desisted in landing forces in Sicily and Sardinia. Although not officially at war, a Royal Navy fleet, commanded by Sir George Byng, was ordered to ward off the Spanish Navy landing Spanish troops. Though Byng was uncertain of the Spanish fleet’s reaction from the outset, their opening salvoes and attempts to retreat settled the matter, as reported by Byng in his despatch to Josiah Burchett, Secretary of the Admiralty, 6 August 1718:

‘On the 30th July ... I saw two scouts of the Spanish fleet in the Fare [Strait of Messina, between Sicily and Italy] very near us ... at the same time a felucca ... from the Calabria shore assured me they saw from the hills the Spanish fleet ... I stood through the Fare after their scouts, which I imagined would lead me to their fleet, which they did, for before noon I had a fair sight of all the fleet, who drew in a line of battle. On my approaching them they went away from me large but in their order, the fleet consisting of 26 men-of-war small and great, two fireships, four bombs, seven galleys, and several ships with stores and provisions. I ordered the Kent, Superb, Graton, and Orford ... the best sailers [sic] of the fleet, to make what sail they could up with the Spaniards, and the ships that could get headmost, and nearest, to them should carry the lights usually wore by me that I might lose sight of them in the night, and made

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what sail I could with the rest of the fleet to come up with them, it being little winds, their galleys took hold of their heaviest sailers and towed them all night. The next morning, so soon as it was day, they finding us pretty near up with their fleet, the galleys and smaller ships, with the fireships, bombs, separated from the admiral and bigger ships and stood in for the shore, after whom I sent Captain Walton in the Canterbury with seven ships more to pursue them that stood in with the land. As our ships were coming up with them, one of the Spaniards fired a broadside at the Argyle ... Seeing our ships engaged with several of those in with the shore, I sent orders to Captain Walton to rendezvous after the action at Syracuse ... We pursuing our chase after the Spanish admiral, with three of his rear-admirals, and the biggest ships which stayed by their flags, until we came near them. The captains of the Kent, Superb, Grafton, and Orford, who having my orders to make what sail they could to place themselves by the first four headmost ships, were the first that came up with their fleet, at whom the Spaniards first fired their stern chase. I sent to those ships not to fire, without the Spaniards repeated their firing again, which when they did, the Orford attacked the Santa Rosa, which some time after she took. The San Carlos next struck without much opposition, which the Kent took possession of. The Grafton attacked warmly the [Principe de] Asturias but the Breda and Captain coming up, she left that ship for them to take (which they soon did) and stretched ahead after another 60-gun ship, who was on his starboard bow, while he engaged the Asturias, and kept firing his stern chase on the Grafton. About one o'clock, the Kent and Superb engaged the Spanish admiral, who with two ships more fired on them, and made a running fight until about three. At last, the Kent bearing down upon him and under his stern gave him his broadside and went away to leeward of him, the Superb put for it, and laid himself on board falling on his weather quarter, but the Spanish admiral, shifting his helm, and avoiding him, the Superb ranged up under his lee quarter on which he struck to her, at the same time the Barfleur being within shot of him astern, inclining on his weather quarter, one of their rear-admirals, and another 60-gun ship which were to the windward of us, bore down, and gave us their broadsides and then clapped upon a wind, standing in

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for the land, after whom I stood until it was almost night, it being little wind and they galing from me out of reach, I left pursuing them and stood away to the fleet again, which I joined two hours after night. The Essex took the Juno, the Montague and Rupert took the Flying Ann. Vice Admiral Cornwall followed the Grafton to support her, but it being very little wind, and the night coming on, the Spaniards galed away from the Grafton. Rear-Admiral Delaval with the Royal Oak pursued two ships that paid away more leewardly than the rest ... The ship that suffered most with us was the Grafton (Captain Nicholas Haddock), who, though he had not the fortune to take away any particular ship, yet was engaged with several; he behaved himself very much like an officer and seaman, and bid fair for the general good, and for stopping the way of those four ships, that he pursued, who got away not through his fault, but failure of wind and his own sails and rigging much shattered'. Byng captured seven Spanish ships in this victorious naval pursuit action.

VICTORY AT FINISTERRE

The first and most spectacular Royal Navy victory achieved during the War of the Austrian Succession (1739–48) was by Admiral George Anson at the First Battle of Finisterre, 3 May 1747. Anson was in command of the Western Squadron tasked with protecting British trade, intercepting enemy convoys, and also to help defend the English Channel. Early in 1747, French plans of mounting expeditions to India and North America became known to the Admiralty, who in turn made plans to intercept them. In the spring of 1747, Anson was undertaking training exercises with his squadron practising ‘forming line of battle, bearing down together and the evolutions of attack’, which was lauded by his second-in-command, Adm Peter Warren:

‘Sir how necessary tis to exercise the fleet ... tis pretty difficult to keep a good line close by the wind; and I think you next please to exercise the fleet in separate divisions, and abreast, the line should be formed at a distance

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one division to windward of the other, as you shall judge proper, and the windward one to go down on the leeward in order of battle so near as you would have them engage an enemy’.

On the morning of 3 May, a French convoy under Admiral de la Jonquiére was sighted and intercepted by Anson. Jonquiére formed a line of battle comprising six battle ships with three armed Indiamen ahead to allow his large accompanying convoy to disperse and escape. Anson having already ordered his 14 ships into a line of battle sought to strike the centre of the enemy line. At this, Jonquiére ordered his ships to break their line of battle and to escape. Anson ordered his leading ships to pursue and attack each French ship they could reach, causing as much damage as possible to cripple them, so that the rest of his ships could disable them.

Captain Peter Denis commanding HMS *Centurion* was the first to engage the enemy targeting both the *Sérieux* and *Invincible*. Anson recounted that: ‘the *Namur*, *Defiance* and *Windsor* being the headmost ships soon entered into the action, and after having disabled these ships in such a manner that the ships astern must come up with them, they made sail ahead to prevent the van of the enemy making an escape, as did also several other ships of the fleet’. Anson then adds later in the afternoon: ‘the *Yarmouth* and *Devonshire* having got up and engaged the enemy and the *Prince George* [his ship] being near the *Invincible* and going to fire into her, all the ships in the enemy’s rear stuck their colours betwixt six and seven o’clock as did all those that were in the line, before night’.

All of Jonquiére’s ships were captured, with 18 of the 36 ships that made up the merchant convoy. Anson reflected on the reasons for this success: ‘the fire on our side was much greater and more regular than theirs; and it is very evident our shott were better placed’. Moreover, tactically Anson’s victory paved the way for further future Royal Navy pursuit victories.

The most significant naval battle in the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) was the Battle of Quiberon Bay on 20 November 1759. In defeating the French fleet in this battle Sir Edward Hawke demonstrated remarkable levels of courage and seamanship, not only thwarting an invasion

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The ships taken as prizes at the Battle of Finisterre. To the left are the French ships, Gloire and Jason with the Spanish ship Glorioso on the right. Engraving by J. Mynd c.1747.

attempt of Britain but also significantly reducing in the wider context of the war the capacity of French navy ships to escort supply convoys.

France had planned to combine both their fleets at Toulon and Brest to escort a waiting army on transport ships near Quiberon Bay off north-west France to attack Britain. A squadron commanded by Robert Duff was ordered to watch over these transport ships. Meanwhile, poor weather conditions had prevented the Brest fleet, comprising 21 ships of the line and six frigates under the command of the Comte de Conflans, to sail and make this rendezvous until 14 November 1759. Intelligence was received by Hawke two days later that Conflans's fleet had left Brest and he immediately set sail for Quiberon Bay from Torbay. In his account of the action, Hawke reported that at 8.30am on 20 November near Belle Isle: 'the *Maidstone* made the signal for seeing a fleet', and that at 9.45am the *Magnanime* 'made the signal for an enemy'. Hawke then

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Map showing the Battle of Quiberon Bay during the Seven Years' War. The islands of Belle-Ile, Houat and Hoedic are situated to the west.

describes his relentless pursuit in heavy seas, among unknown islands, waters and rocks, of the French as they attempted to escape:

'I threw out the signal, for the seven ships nearest to them to chase, and to draw into a line of battle ahead of me, and endeavour to stop them till the rest of the squadron should come up, who were also to form as they chased, that no time might be lost in the pursuit. That morning they were in the chase of the Rochester, Chatham, Portland, Falkland, Minerva, Vengeance and Venus, all which joined me about 11 am; and in the evening the Sapphire from Quiberon Bay. All the day we had very fresh gales at N.W. and W.N.W. with heavy squalls. Conflans kept going off under sail as all his squadron could carry, and at the same time keep together, while we crowded after him with every sail our ships could bear. At 2.30pm the fore beginning ahead, I made the signal for engaging. We were then to the southward of Belle Isle, and the French admiral headmost, soon led

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round the Cardinals, while his rear was in action. About 4pm, the Formidable struck and a little after the Thésée and Superbe were sunk. About 5pm the Héros struck and came to anchor, but it blowing hard, no boat could be sent onboard her night was now come, and being on a part of the coast, among islands and shoals, of which we totally ignorant, without a pilot, as was the greatest part of the squadron, and blowing hard on a lee shore, I made the signal to anchor [near] the island of Dumet’.

The following daybreak revealed chaotic battle scenes as recorded in Capt Augustus Keppel’s log for HMS *Torbay*:

‘Two of the enemies ships [the Heros and the Soleil Royal] that had anchored in the night were forced to run ashore near Croizie ... the Resolution being ashore with all her masts gone on the foursand [four shoal]; the Admiral made the Essex’s signal to go to her assistance who by not being acquainted with the sand likewise run aground ... saw 6 or 7 sail of the enemy’s large ships and two or three frigates close in shore and as we supposed aground’.

Most of these enemy ships escaped up the river Villaine by casting overboard their cargo and guns to clear the river estuary’s sandbank, while others escaped to the port at Rochefort, despite Hawkes’ efforts to capture them. Although Hawke had lost two ships, the French had suffered seven ship losses (one was captured, six were either sunk or wrecked). There was a fine line between failure and the security of Britain and success, which Hawke had riskily calculated to his advantage: ‘I can boldly affirm that all that could possibly be done has been done. As to the loss we have sustained let it be placed to the account of necessity I was under of running all risks to break this strong force of the enemy’.

A SEAMAN’S ACCOUNT OF BATTLE

Many reports of famous Royal Navy battles are made by commanding officers; it is uncommon to find a seaman’s battle account. However, one

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such an account does survive, by John Jup, an ordinary seaman on HMS *Orion*, dated 26 November 1798, which recounts Horatio Nelson's stunning victory during the French Revolutionary Wars at the Battle of the Nile on 1 August 1798 in which 11 French warships and two frigates were either captured or destroyed:

'On the 1st August came in sight of Alexandria and the French fleet lying at anchor at the head of the River Nile, Bonaparte with his transports with troops had got possession of Alexandria and were gone up the River to plunder and invade the place – all up the country – and had left the fleet there to carry off the booty – but now my brave boys for Old England Glory our Admiral made a signal to come to an anchor close alongside of them and hammer away, so now at 6 o'clock at night began the bloody fray we continued a most thundering and tremendous noise till near half past ten during which time we set LeOrient of 120 guns on fire and burnt her to the magazine and then she blew up [which] explosion made the whole element shake and was a most glorious scene to us ... the firing though not so hot lasted till 10 o'clock. Next day when we found ourselves totally master of the French fleet ... although they were superior to us considerable such a defeat as never was known in the world before. As for the number of their killed and wounded I cannot account for them that was not killed where most of them wounded I suppose 500 blew up in the le Orion [sic] as she had 1100 on board and about 600 were saved from death by swimming to other ship I was on board LeDourin and she had about 50 out of 550 left free from death and wounds. We have now been rigging masts and repairing as fast as we can. On Tuesday the 14th of August we set sail under the command of our Captain with 6 prizes leaving the Admiral there to watch the motion of the French with 6 sail this day arrived the 2 frigates and brig which we lost in Gulf Lyon so all good things happens together they joined the Admiral ... my brave country men be not in fear of invasion for the lord will prosper your land and will in time restore peace it is the supreme that fight the battle and whilst we have his help we will defy the world before us my good lads drink your tea in quiet and let no false alarms frighten you think on the wooden walls and the brave fellows that are in them remember they are your

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safety therefore when you see poor jack tar in distress relieve him as one good turn deserves another ... During the Action after the hottest the French come swimming from their ships that was on fire and our brave spirited Englishmen threw them rope and took them in and stripped of their own clothes and gave them to cover their nakedness and went without themselves ... this action must have a great applause on several accounts first that we engaged them at anchor, secondly that we engaged them in the night, thirdly they being such superior forces and got such a terrible defeat as out of 17 sail only four escaped. In the morning we cut a fine figure not scarce a mast standing to most of the French ships and there sides where so full of holes as a riddle as for our ships many of them were not much better the Orion had spanker boom carried away and all her masts wounded and all her yards and not a bit of rigging but what was cut in some place or other by the shot the French informs us they meant to plunder all the places down the straights but we have stopped their career'.



At the Battle of the Nile, 1 August 1798, the British fleet destroyed the French fleet in Aboukir Bay in a night battle. This illustration shows the French vessel L'Orient exploding at about 10 o'clock.

CHAPTER NINE

MUTINY
IN THE
GEORGIAN
NAVY



Of the many possible dangers faced while serving in the Royal Navy, the threat of mutiny was one of the most feared, especially for captains and officers commanding a ship. In a wider context, when mutinous behaviour manifested itself in mass revolts in the Royal Navy for better conditions of service – for example in the Channel Fleet at Spithead and the Nore in 1797, when Britain was at war with France – it would become a critical issue for the naval authorities, the State and the security of the nation.

Life at sea typically during this period was spent undertaking laboriously intensive yet monotonous routine duties to ensure that ships were kept afloat, day in, day out, sometimes stretching for several years and rarely setting foot on land. Ships were often deployed in gruelling activities such as blockading enemy ports or on convoy duties escorting merchant ships. Away from family and friends, cut off from communications from the outside world, ships carried crew whose numbers ranged from more than 800 on a first-rate ship, such as HMS *Victory*, to 160 on board sixth-rate HMS *Hermione*, and comprised officers and seamen, typically of a cosmopolitan mix, from different backgrounds and strands of society. Whether they were experienced seamen, pressed men, quota men or landsmen, once on board – irrespective of their personal circumstances, hardships and whether they were disaffected, disgruntled or unwilling – it was paramount that they worked together as a team ready to deal with any emergency, in all weathers and varying sea conditions, at a moment's notice.

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A well-disciplined, trained, efficient crew of a sailing ship could be the difference between victory and defeat in battle, or life and death in a raging storm.

In such floating communities, in isolation far from land, often in crowded, cramped, damp conditions working under such strains it was imperative that discipline was maintained as any disobedience of orders or any misdeed could put the safety of the ship and the lives of all those who served on board at risk. The good conduct and well-being of ship's crews was the responsibility of the captain and the officers. This conduct was regulated by the Articles of War, the Royal Navy's own disciplinary code and the captain's interpretation of it (see Chapter 3). Mirroring society ashore, in shipboard life there occurred many instances of minor misdemeanours, unacceptable social behaviour, repeat offending and more serious crimes. The captain had to decide whether to punish quickly *in situ* such occurrences, or for more serious offences whether to call a court martial with all its inherent drawbacks (see Chapter 3). Sometimes captains did not report acts of mutiny for court martial because they didn't want to draw attention to their conduct and problems on board their ship but also because of the potential severity of the punishment if an allegation of mutiny was upheld. Mutiny in a naval or military service is always tried before a court martial. Invariably the penalty was hanging at the yardarm. If an entire ship's company mutinied, the ringleaders were usually hanged.

The key for a captain to avoid having an unruly ship's crew was to ensure a fair and consistent approach to discipline. A captain who abused this power in a draconian manner was more likely to have to deal with mutinous conduct.

WHAT CONSTITUTES A MUTINY?

The current legal definition of mutiny defines it as resistance by force to recognised authority, an insurrection particularly applied to any form of sedition in any naval or military force of a nation. A more general

Mutiny in the Georgian Navy



*The mutineers turning William Bligh and his crew
adrift from HMS Bounty, 1790.*

common view would be to associate mutiny with the seizure of the control of a ship by its crew from its officers using violent force, as was the case in the infamous mutiny on board HMS *Bounty* on 28 April 1789. During this event, part of the crew was led by Acting Lieutenant Fletcher Christian against their captain, William Bligh. Another infamous mutiny involved the murder of Captain Hugh Pigot and nine officers on HMS *Hermione* on 21 September 1797. Such instances are more obvious examples of mutiny but are in fact rare in the history of the Royal Navy and as such are not mentioned directly in the 1749 Articles of War, which had remained virtually unchanged since 1652.

In its strictest traditional sense, the Royal Navy also identified mutiny as the refusal to obey the legal order of a superior officer. Out of the 36 Articles comprising the 1749 Articles of War only three focused directly on mutiny. Anyone found guilty by court martial of any of the offences set out in Article 19, for mutinous assemblies and the uttering of seditious words, was sentenced to death for the former charge and for

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the latter charge received either a death sentence or a suitable punishment as decided by a court martial. Article 20 dealt with the concealing of mutinous practice (punishment death or suitable punishment) or the concealing of mutinous words (suitable punishment), while Article 34 related to anyone found guilty of mutiny, desertion or disobedience on shore, for which the punishment would be the same as if the offence had happened on board ship. Article 22, although specifically about the striking of a superior officer (punishment death) and/or disobeying their lawful commands (death or suitable punishment), was generally considered to be mutiny even though it was not implicitly mentioned in the Article. These same Articles and punishments were carried forwards to the amended 1757 Articles of War.

Owing to the vagueness in the Articles about what constituted mutiny and the varying levels of punishment that could be meted out by courts martial it is not surprising that there were inconsistencies in sentencing. This is highlighted in the court martial of W. Holmes, seaman of HMS *Rippon*, who was tried for mutinous behaviour on 2 January 1766 at Portsmouth harbour – a case in which there was a good deal of confusion surrounding the arbitrary descriptions of the officers stating the different charges. The incident that led to the charge of mutinous behaviour was that one afternoon Holmes had tumbled against the boatswain's cabin, resulting in the latter ordering him away, to which Holmes answered 'he might be damned and his cabin too'. The boatswain then came out with a stick and hit Holmes several times with it. Some people led Holmes away and, staggering along, he said the boatswain was a bloody bugger and he would rip his guts open. The case could not be distinguished from any common one of drunkenness – whereby a drunk person expresses abuse, anger or disrespect but has little or no consciousness of doing so at the time – and as a result of this indecision, rather than being charged with mutiny, which potentially carried a harsher judgement, Holmes was sentenced to receive 200 lashes.

Some used the ambiguity of the Articles to justify their mutinous actions. For example, on 7 November 1758 a court martial hearing heard

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that Captain Peter Carteret, commander of HMS *Stork*, sailed from Hispaniola to Jamaica with a party from HMS *Stork* in a French flag of truce. During the passage Carteret was informed by his lieutenant that the men were up in arms and crying 'liberty one and all by god'. The captain observed that Thomas Hassey, Patrick O'Hara, Charles Elliott, Thomas Johnson were particularly riotous and apparently the ringleaders inciting the rest to follow their example. O'Hara had a spit in his hand, which he clasped to the captain's breast saying 'God damn you keep off'. The captain responded by asking what was the matter, to which O'Hara answered 'Who are you? God damn you, Who are you? keep off', then, 'that as they were most of them pressed men, they were determined one and all, never to go on board a man of war again'. The captain reminded them that they had all heard the Articles of War being read out, and that they were as much under command in a flag of truce as they were on board HMS *Stork*. Hassey answered 'that such a thing had never been done as reading the English Articles of War under the French flag'. There was a general cry for the lieutenant acting, whom they called dog and rascal, and damned their eyes but they would have his ears. Their behaviour was so outrageous that the captain directed the lieutenant to be kept out of the way. O'Hara and Elliot came upon the quarterdeck and had they not been prevented from doing so by the captain and officers would have gone down and murdered the lieutenant. On reaching Jamaica, Hassey came to the captain and informed him he was deputed by the rest to say 'that they would make what sail they pleased for Jamaica, that they did not want to hurt any officer unless opposed, but they were determined to have their liberty and would stand by one another to the last man, and if conquerors, they would put to death that opposed them'. The captain endeavoured in vain to dissuade him from such purpose, but they carried on, frequently threatening the pilot that unless he carried them safe into port 'they would break his arms and legs ... and heave the log with him'. In the night, Elliot attempted to stab the man at the helm (a Frenchman) but was prevented by the men on deck. He then swore 'he would have blood' and went and killed two turkeys in the coops. In this manner the Flag of

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Truce was carried forcibly into Port Morant and 17 men and one boy went on shore. The four ringleaders in this mutiny – Hassey, O'Hara, Elliot and Johnson – were brought to trial for their crime, convicted and sentenced to hang.

The Articles of War also applied to breaches of discipline on land as well as at sea. For instance, at a court martial on board HMS *Bredab* on 25 July 1726 at Bastimentos. James Ambrose, Charles McDonald, Richard Newman and George Newton, all belonging to HMS *Kinsale*, were charged with mutiny and mutinous behaviour on land having refused orders during an argument to board a boat to take them back to their ship. The court, having examined the evidence upon oath, found McDonald and Newman not guilty and acquitted them. Jonas Ambrose and George Newton were found guilty. Ambrose was sentenced to receive 15 lashes on his bare back alongside each of the HM ships in port, and George Newton was sentenced to receive 39 lashes on his bare back on his proper ship.

MUTINY AT SEA

Many incidences of mutiny were attributable to the overdue payment of wages, grievances about conditions of service, arguments between individuals or the brutal command of a captain or officers.

Money, or the lack of it, was often a motivation to mutiny, as was the case when on 29 January 1779 John Carr and others refused to carry out their duties until they received their pay. Along with Carr, John Singleton, Thomas Lambert and Robert Nags were identified as the ringleaders and on March 1779 they, together with six other seamen, were brought to trial. Carr, Singleton and a seaman by the name of Cook were found guilty and sentenced to death, while the remainder received sentences of 200–300 lashes each.

On 10 October 1755 at Halifax harbour, John Payne, a seaman on HMS *Jamaica* was court-martialled for frequently uttering words of sedition and mutiny. In particular, he swore he would be the death of

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some of the officers for he had made his will to the devil and signed it with his own blood. He especially threatened the master's life, because it was on his account that he had been put in irons. During the court martial, Mr Fuller the midshipman disposed that when rowing the sloop up the Delaware, he cheered the men to pull away, upon which Payne said 'damn my blood if all the men were of my mind, the sloop won't be rowed up to night'. The court found Payne guilty under both the 16th and 19th Articles of War and sentenced him to hang by the neck, till he is dead at the yardarm of HMS *Jamaica*.

Owen Desmond, a foremast man of HMS *Bonetta* on 10 October 1757 at Sheerness harbour, was convicted by court martial of mutinous behaviour for calling the captain and lieutenant 'villain and rascal' to their faces before the ship's company and was sentenced to receive 200 lashes.

On 21 September 1758 at the Nore, Hugh Jackson was tried on the basis of a complaint that he was the author of a letter tending to excite mutiny on his ship and reflecting upon the conduct of Captain Arbuthnot. The letter was signed 'all hands'. The court found the charge proved under the latter parts of both the 20th and 21st Articles of War and sentenced Jackson to receive 300 lashes with a halter about his neck, alongside such HM ships as the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty should be pleased to direct.

T. Sherlock, seaman of HMS *Portland*, was ordered to be seized after he collared the boatswain's mate, to which Sherlock remonstrated by calling out 'Goddamn the Captains, Lieutenants, and all the officers in the ship for bloody red flag'd buggers, were they going to murder him, I insist to be tried by courts martial'. For this behaviour, which was deemed mutinous, a court martial held on 13 September 1774 at Portsmouth harbour sentenced Sherlock to receive 150 lashes.

At a court martial on 13 December 1776, F. Foster, master of HMS *Carcass*, was accused of behaving in a most disorderly and mutinous manner to Lieutenant J. Stoddart because the latter had refused Foster's request to go on shore. Foster said publicly on deck that Stoddart was a villain, scoundrel and fraudulent rascal and that he meant to cheat the seamen of their wages, along with other similar abuse. The court

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adjudged Foster to be dismissed and rendered incapable of serving as an officer in the Royal Navy.

John Pike and four other seamen belonging to HMS *Invincible* could consider themselves fortunate in being acquitted for mutinous behaviour at a court martial held on 7 March 1758 in Portsmouth harbour. They were accused of cutting adrift the long boat and leaving the ship when ashore and in distress, notwithstanding the captain and officers trying to prevent them. However, the court did not consider the evidence produced sufficient to establish the charge, and the general good behaviour of the prisoners helped their cause; they were accordingly acquitted.

Many mutinies in the Georgian period resulted typically from lower-deck seamen's grievances about the quality of food, unpaid wages or alleged unreasonable behaviour of superior officers. Such mutinies usually took place in ports and their underlying causes were manifested as a strike or demonstration. It was uncommon for mutinies in the Royal Navy to take place at sea, or indeed result in the piratical seizure of the command of the ship, or for this type of mutiny to be led by officers. In the first half of the 18th century, for example, the only instance of this occurring was on HMS *Chesterfield* in 1748.

Under the command of Capt O'Brian Dudley, HMS *Chesterfield* was anchored off the Cape Coast, West Africa. On the night of 15 October, Dudley, most of his officers and some seamen were dining ashore with the president and council of Cape Coast Castle. Wishing to return to his ship, Dudley had sent instructions with his barge ordering the lieutenant of marines, Samuel Couchman, to send the ship's cutter with Roger Gastril, the boatswain, to return to gather the officers and seamen on shore with their belongings. Couchman flatly refused this request and instead ordered the barge to be hoisted in and the boatswain to turn all hands to the quarterdeck. Couchman then emerged from his cabin armed with a sword stating: 'Here I am: God damn me, I will stand by you while I have a drop of blood in my body!' With Couchman were a further three ringleaders – John Morgan, lieutenant of marines; Thomas Knight, the carpenter; and John Place, carpenter's mate – as

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well as about 30 seamen with cutlasses who 'gave three huzzas, and threw their hats overboard; damning old hats, they would soon get new'.

Couchman then asked Gastril if he would join him in the piratical seizure of the ship, to which the boatswain replied 'No... For God's sake, Sir, be ruled by reason, and consider what you are about'. Even under the threat of being put in irons the boatswain refused Couchman's demands. Couchman then called for the ship's master's mate, Thomas Gilham, asking him also to join him in his mutinous designs. Gilham asked Couchman what his plans were, to which he replied: 'To take, burn, and sink, and settle a colony in the East Indies'. Couchman next put the boatswain and several others in confinement but later dismissed them.

The following day, Couchman again confronted the boatswain, asking him what he thought of the situation. The boatswain's response was that it was 'rank piracy', to which Couchman replied: 'What I have done I cannot now go from: I was forced to it by the ship's-company.' The boatswain then told him: 'that would be no sanction for his running away with the king's ship'.

Even though Couchman had taken possession of all of the arms on board ship, that evening the boatswain and some of the non-mutineering element of the ship's company, with a supply of pistols provided by John Salmon, the gunner, bravely managed to retake control of the ship, capturing Couchman, Morgan and Knight, and so quelled the mutiny after about 30 hours.

At the resulting court martial on 14 July 1749 at Portsmouth the mutineers were charged with 'exciting and encouraging mutiny, and running away with his Majesty's ship *Chesterfield*'. Couchman, along with Morgan, was found guilty and sentenced to death. Both being officers, according to Admiralty custom they were executed by firing squad later that day.

Some of the other ringleaders and mutineers – Thomas Knight, carpenter; John Place, carpenter's mate; John Meeks, seaman; William Anderson, seaman; John Reed, quartermaster; Thomas Scott, seaman – were found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging from the yardarm – a slow and agonising end in plain view that was intended as a warning.

JUSTICE AND RETRIBUTION

Irrespective of how courts martial dealt with mutiny it is clear that the higher echelons of the Admiralty viewed the act with contempt. For instance, when the news of the mutiny and murder on board HMS *Hermione* on 21 September 1797 reached Sir Hyde Parker, commander-in-chief of the West Indies, he reacted with disgust and indignation, offering rewards for the capture of any of the mutineers, as well as:

‘[a] pardon to any (the principals excepted) who shall turn kings evidence for bringing the principal actors to justice ... it being of such importance to the Salvation of the Naval Force of Great Britain, that the cruel perpetrators of this piracy should be brought to justice to condign punishment and most exemplary examples of’.

This served as a deterrent and made clear the punishment awaiting those convicted of mutiny or mutineers still at large as a result of mutinous actions, irrespective of how long it would take to track them down. In the case of the *Hermione* mutineers, in the nine years after the murders were committed, 33 mutineers were caught, charged and tried, 24 of these being hanged and gibbeted, one transported and eight acquitted. In October 1797, HMS *Hermione* was recaptured in a daring raid by Capt Edward Hamilton in command of HMS *Surprise* and symbolically renamed HMS *Retaliation* by Parker. Following this, on 31 January 1800, the Admiralty renamed the ship HMS *Retribution*.

CHAPTER TEN

WOMEN
AT SEA
IN THE
AGE OF
SAIL



The composition of Royal Navy ship's crews during the age of sail perhaps surprisingly was not solely the preserve of men; reference to women on board naval ships can be traced back to the 14th century. In his *Historia Anglicana*, the English chronicler Thomas Walsingham records that prostitutes were present on ships commanded by Thomas of Woodstock, the Earl of Buckingham, and John IV, Duke of Brittany, during an ill-fated attack against a Spanish fleet off Brest. The episode got off to a bad start, since preparations for the battle had been hampered by bad weather necessitating repairs to ships and, although eight Spanish ships were captured, the efforts of the Earl and Duke were considered a failure – something that Walsingham attributed to God's retribution for taking 'public women' to sea with them.

The notion that a woman by her presence on board a ship could bring about perilous storms and bad luck was a deep-rooted supernatural belief that could have tragic consequences. For example, when ships commanded by Sir John Arundel set sail to assist the Duke of Brittany, who was being attacked by the French, were hit by severe gales off the Cornish coast in December 1379, 60 females – comprising prostitutes, 'married women, widows and young ladies of rank' – were hurled overboard by the sailors. Despite this action, the storms persisted and 25 ships of Arundel's fleet were wrecked, resulting in many fatalities, including Arundel himself.

More evidence of the presence of women on naval ships can be traced in 'orders to be used in the Kinges majesties navie by the see' by Thomas Audley at the command of King Henry VIII, pre-dating 1553, which

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stipulated that ‘No women to lie a shippe borde all nyght’. Clearly, though, this ruling was not always upheld, as is evident in the writing of Henry Teonge, a Royal Navy chaplain on board HMS *Assistance* in 1675, who recounts preaching his first sermon at sea:

‘I could not stand without holding both the pillars in the steerage and the Captain’s chair and others were ready to tilt down sometimes backwards, sometimes forwards. All our women and old seamen were sick this day; I was only giddy ... the last of the women seem to have been sent ashore at Dover on the following Monday week, after having been about three weeks on board’.

Irrespective of the illogical supernatural beliefs and attempts to regulate their presence, then, women from the 17th to the early 19th century both lived and worked on board naval ships, even though they were barely tolerated or were officially ignored.

PROSTITUTION IN PORTS

The arrival of Royal Navy ships in ports after long voyages, where men expected to finally be paid their wages and potentially be reunited with their wives (often with children) after prolonged absences, were usually met with scenes of joy and chaos.

The joy of returning to land was something that could be used to control seamen, and the denial of shore leave was one punishment that could be threatened. However, in these cases, to avoid incidences of mass desertion or mutinous behaviour, ships would be moored offshore and hundreds of women would be ferried to them in boats. Single men who had not seen a woman for long periods of time, who had been denied leave of duty for fear of desertion, and who were about to be paid their accumulated wages were attractive targets for prostitutes.

This typical scene is described by William Robinson, ‘Jack Nasty-Face’, who served on HMS *Revenge* from 1805 to 1811, including service at

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the Battle of Trafalgar. His memoir records the arrival of HMS *Revenge* at Portsmouth:

'On the arrival of any man of war in port, these girls flock down to the shore where boats are always ready; and here may be witnessed a scene, somewhat similar to the trafficking for slaves in the West Indies. As they approached a boat, [the boatmen] ... surveys them from stem to stern, with the eyes of a bargaining jew, and carefully culls out the best looking, and the most dashing dressed ... After having moored our ship, swarms of boats came round us ... a great many of them were freighted with cargoes of ladies, a sight that was most gratifying, and a great treat, for our crew, consisting of six hundred and upwards, nearly all young men, had seen but one woman on board for eighteen months ... so soon as these boats were allowed to come alongside, the seamen flocked down pretty quick, one after the other and brought their choice up ... in the course of the afternoon, we had four hundred and fifty [women] on board'.

For many seamen the appearance of their female next of kin and other 'ladies' bringing copious amounts of liquor proved a welcome respite from the monotony of shipboard life. A graphic description of typical scenes in the cramped quarters of the lower deck can be found in a pamphlet, *Statement Respecting the Prevalence of Certain Immoral Practises Prevailing in His Majesty's Navy*, by Admiral Edward Hawker, published in 1821:

'They then descend to the lower deck with their husbands, as they call them. Hundreds come off to a large ship. The whole of the shocking, disgraceful transactions of the lower deck is impossible to describe, the dirt, filth and stench, the disgusting conversation, the indecent, beastly conduct and horrible scenes, the blasphemy and swearing, the riots, quarrels and fighting, which often takes place, where hundreds of men and women are buddled together in one room, as it were in bed (each man being allowed only fourteen inches breadth for his hammock), they are squeezed between the next hammocks, and must be witnesses of each other's actions ... It is frequently the case that men take two prostitutes on board at a time, so that that sometimes there are more

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women than men on board ... Men and women are turned by hundreds into one compartment, and in sight and bearing of each other, shamelessly and blushing couple like dogs. Let those who have never seen a ship of war picture to themselves a very large low room (hardly capable of holding the men) with five hundred men and probably three hundred or four hundred women of the vilest description shut up in it, and giving way to every excess of debauchery that the grossest passions of human nature can lead them to, and they see the deck of a seventy-four gun ship the night of her arrival in port.'

From a seaman's perspective the presence of women on board ships in port was seen as a right and the naval authorities tolerated the situation because to ban 'wives' when men were not allowed shore leave would be to risk mass desertion and mutinous disobedience. It would be rare for captains to even consider preventing women from boarding ship, since they neither wished to prove unpopular nor to antagonise their crew. Such customs were therefore allowed, even on foreign stations, as long as it did not impact on a ship's routine and preparations to set sail, as Prince William Henry's (later William IV) was at great pains to stress in his ship's order book: 'requesting and directing the first lieutenant or commanders to see all strangers out of His Majesty's ship under my command at gunfire [sunset] is by no means meant to restrain the officers and men from having either black or white women on board through the night, so long as the discipline is unhurt by the indulgence'.

On occasion women could live several weeks on board a ship in port but they were expected to leave once it was ordered to sea, as revealed by Edward Thompson, a midshipman on board HMS *Stirling Castle* with a crew of 480, in 1756:

'each man possessing a temporary lady, whose pride is her constancy to the man she chooses; and in this particular they are strictly so. I have known 350 women sup and sleep on board on a Sunday evening, and return at daybreak to their different plantations'. A similar account is to be found in a letter by Horatio Nelson to Adm John Jervis in 1801: 'I hope there will be orders to complete our complement, and the ship to be paid on

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Saturday. On Sunday we shall get rid of all the women, dogs and pigeons, and on Wednesday, with the lark, I hope to be under sail for Torbay'.

THE ADMIRALTY'S ATTITUDE TO WOMEN

In 1731, the Admiralty published its first set of printed Regulations and Instructions governing the Royal Navy. In the section regarding the captain on page 31, Article 38, it is stated that: 'he is not to carry any woman to sea, nor to entertain any foreigners to serve in the ship, who are Officers or Gentlemen, without orders from the Admiralty'. This more or less sums up the Admiralty's official stance to women throughout the 18th century, except for a minor regulatory addition that highlights the notion that women were an encumbrance in the undertaking of Royal Navy duties. The 1757 Regulations and Instructions adds the following to the previously cited 1731 rules, under additional instructions in Article 12 under a section entitled rules for preserving cleanliness: 'following rules about the necessity for men to keep themselves clean, that the ship is to be aired and kept thoroughly clean, that all precautions be used to ensure that proper sentinels are to be deployed to ensure that unauthorised people do not enter the hold or throw anything there that may cause nastiness, that no fruit or strong liquors be sold on board the ship', and, tellingly, that: 'that no women be ever permitted to be on board, but such as are really the wives of men they come to; and the ship not too be too much pestered even with them. But this indulgence is only tolerated while the ship is in port, and not under sailing orders'. However, these rules were widely disregarded by captains as it was seen as an operational necessity that grudgingly needed to be tolerated. It was also impractical to enforce, particularly the proving of a seaman's marital status, even though some captains tried. For example, Captain James Gambier in 1793 ordered all women boarding his ship, HMS *Defence*, to show their marriage certificates – a measure that 'created a very unpleasant feeling amongst the tars [seamen]'. By contrast, other captains themselves ridiculed fellow officers who attempted to enforce this

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ruling. Moreover, the Admiralty were not too interested in such matters unless it was brought to their attention in different circumstances, for example, in the proceedings of a court martial or a claim for a medal.

Instances of women definitely not being tolerated was when their presence put the ship at risk, as highlighted by Admiral Philip Cavendish in a letter to the Admiralty in 1741:

'the Shrewsbury had like to have been burnt, the other night by the unwarrantable liberty which Thomas Martin, sailmaker of the said ship took to lay with his wife in the sail room ... I hope their Lordships will be pleased for an example to order this person to be tried at court martial, for I doubt, notwithstanding the strict orders to prevent such practices, the officers store rooms are made too free with, the Boatswain is very culpable and ought likewise to be called to account and I don't think the officers of the ship have done their duty, in not taking the proper care pursuant to their instructions to prevent such accidents'.

By contrast, there were times when the presence of women on board ships was officially sanctioned. On the outbreak of war against France in 1793, for instance, there were insufficient numbers of Royal Marines to be put on board Royal Navy ships. This shortfall was addressed by the use of army personnel in their place – an arrangement that lasted four years. If a soldier were married and on active service abroad, his wife and children could join him, so these arrangements were extended to soldiers serving at sea. The wives were victualled at two-thirds allowance, and children at half allowance. Such families were present in some of the key Royal Navy actions and battles of the Napoleonic Wars, such as the Battle of Genoa (14 March 1795), where there were 48 women and 16 children, and the Battle of Cape St Vincent (14 February 1797), at which 23 women and 20 children were present.

Women serving as either nurses or laundresses on board Royal Navy hospital ships, in existence since 1608, were also officially recognised and remunerated as early as 1696. Attitudes to them were mixed, though, as their competency was called into question. Female

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nurses serving on the hospital ship *Princess Anne* in 1703, for instance, were heavily criticised by Admiral George Byng and Daniel Furzer, surveyor of the Navy, who pointed out: 'that the women now entertained as nurses take up a great deal of room and in the opinion of the captain and surgeon, are rather an inconvenience than otherwise and that they "have done little or no service the last year but are continually drunk as often as opportunity would permit, and then very mutinous"'. Fears that such female nurses might be overly amorous with fellow medical staff or patients were met with the suggestion 'that none should be employed under the age of fifty, and they were to be seamen's wives or widows'.

It was common for official permission to be granted to captains and admirals to allow their wives, daughters and female guests to travel and live on board ships at sea, and a number of warrant officers also took their wives to sea; Horatio Nelson, on board his ship *HMS Foudroyant* in 1800, famously took Emma Hamilton and her husband, Sir William, to Malta. The diaries of Elizabeth (Betsey) Wynne recount her rescue, together with her three sisters and parents, from Napoleon's advancing army in Leghorn (Livorno) in 1796 by her future husband Captain Thomas Fremantle in command of *HMS Inconstant*. The next year, after spending almost a year on board Royal Navy ships and now being pregnant, a 19-year-old woman called Betsey returned to England on *HMS Seaborse* in 1797, the ship that was also conveying the wounded Nelson following the amputation of his right arm, and her husband, who also had a serious arm injury, after the disastrous Battle of Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

It is also known that seamen, too, had the company of their wives at sea on board the lower deck, going against the Admiralty Regulations and Instructions, to which captains often turned a blind eye. These women were not officially recognised in that they were neither officially paid nor victualled, having instead to share their husbands' issue of food. In such cases, their names were not systematically recorded in ship's muster books (crew lists). They were, however, allowed certain privileges, within strict parameters, as can be seen in the general order book dated 1812 of John Fyffe, captain of *HMS Indefatigable*: 'the women belonging to the ship are to be permitted to go on shore twice a week on market days. Should they

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go on any other day, or in any respect act contrary to the regulations of the ship, they are not to be suffered to come on board again’.

WOMEN IN CONFLICT

Rare evidence of the presence of women in battle can be found in HMS *Goliath*’s muster book for the Battle of the Nile in 1798, in which four women’s names are recorded: Sarah Bates, Ann Taylor, Elizabeth Moore and Mary French. Tragically, both Bates’s and French’s husbands died during the engagement, and later so did the husbands of Taylor and Moore through wounds sustained in the action. These widows thereafter for four months were ‘victualled at two-thirds allowance, per Captain’s order, in consideration of their assistance in dressing and attending the wounded’. John Nichol, who also served on HMS *Goliath*, recollected ‘women who carried the powder for the guns’, a woman from Leith who died of her wounds and another woman from Edinburgh who ‘bore a son in the heat of the action’. The latter was not unheard of, and among the babies born at sea was the future Admiral John Ayscough, who was born on board HMS *Swan* in 1775 during a fraught action fought by that vessel, commanded by his father, on their return home from North America.

A Christina White, petitioned Horatio Nelson for a pension for service on board HMS *Majestic* at the Nile, describing herself as a widow with two children of a seaman killed in the battle and who had assisted the surgeon and nursed the wounded on the voyage home.

VICTIMS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Women were also on board ship during some of the most tragic episodes of Royal Navy history. Sheerness Dockyard officers on 7 February 1744, for example, reported in a letter to the Admiralty about the capsizing of HMS *Pembroke* en route from Chatham into Kitt Hole that ‘the sad misfortune ... we hear 100 men besides officers are supposed to be

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drowned with several women'. Thomas Scott, one of the few survivors of HMS *Resistance* when it blew up on 24 July 1797 in the Strait of Banca, South West Sumatra, also deposed that among those who died were three English women, married on board, and one Malay woman of Amboyna; and during the sinking of HMS *Royal George* at Spithead on 29 August 1782, many women and children were reported to 'have been carried down with Rear Admiral Kempenfelt and about 900 souls'.

With the introduction of the Naval General Service Medal in 1847, Queen Victoria directed that 'all who were present' in significant Royal Navy battles and engagements from 1793 to 1840 were to be awarded a medal. This led to three applications by women: Jane Townsend, on board HMS *Defiance* at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805; and Ann Hopping and Mary Ann Riley, who were present at the Battle of the Nile in 1798. Townsend's application, based on her 'useful services', was fully supported by HMS *Defiance*'s captain, Philip Charles Calderwood Henderson Durham. However, upon further consideration these three claims were refused as 'there were many women in the fleet equally useful' and because it was thought it would lead 'to innumerable applications of the same nature'. Another application for a medal, this time accepted, was for a baby, Daniel McKenzie, on board HMS *Tremendous*, at the action of 1 June 1794 – further proof of women serving in battle on Royal Navy ships.

WOMEN IN DISGUISE

There are many notable cases of women disguised as men serving on board Royal Navy ships during 1714 to 1820. Among the most famous are Mary Lacy, alias William Chandler, who served 1759–71; the woman known as William Prothero who served on HMS *Amazon* from 1760 to 1761 as a private in the Royal Marines; Hannah Snell, who served in the Royal Marines for nearly five years as a man named 'James Gray', even concealing her sex when she was wounded at the siege of Pondicherry in 1748; and a black woman named William Brown who served between

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1804 and 1816, reaching the rating of captain of the foretop. The Annual Register of 1815 describes Brown as an

‘an African ... smart, well-formed figure, about five feet four inches in height, possessed of considerable strength and great activity; her features are rather handsome for a black, and she appears to be twenty six years of age ... in her manner she exhibits all the traits of a British tar and takes her grog with her late messmates with the greatest of gaiety. She says she is a married woman and went to sea in consequence of a quarrel with her husband’.

Less well-known instances of women serving on board ships disguised as men are revealed in more unusual circumstances. Both Charley Waddell in 1771 and George Thompson (real name Margaret Thompson) in 1781 were found to be women as they were about to be flogged on the charges of desertion and theft respectively. On land, the *Naval Chronicle* of 1807 reported that an old woman known by the name of Tom Bowling was brought before the magistrate for sleeping all night in the street, where she was committed as a rogue and vagabond and passed to her parish. She had served as boatswain's mate on board a man-of-war for upwards of 20 years, and had a pension from Chatham Chest. When woken at midnight by the watchman in the street, covered with snow, she allegedly cried ‘Where the devil would you have me sleep?’ The paper reported that she generally slept in this way, and that she dressed like a man and was so hardy at a very advanced age that she never caught cold. In a separate article, the *Naval Chronicle* reported on 2 October 1807 that a Lieutenant William Berry of HMS *Hazard* was court-martialled on the charge of sodomy with Thomas Gibbs, a boy – a charge that carried a death sentence. Several witnesses were called in corroboration, among whom was Elizabeth Bowden, who had been serving on board under the name of John Bowden for eight months. Curiosity had prompted her to look through the keyhole of the cabin door and it was ‘thus she became possessed of the evidence she gave’. The paper also stated that she appeared in court dressed in a long jacket and blue trousers. The charges were fully proved and Berry was hanged on 19 October.

EPILOGUE

THE
LEGACY
OF THE
GEORGIAN
NAVY



The legacy of the Georgian Royal Navy from 1714 to 1820 can be evidenced in a number of ways. In its efforts to maintain supremacy at sea the Royal Navy adopted the latest scientific and technological advances in its ships, or sought to sponsor them, and carried out work that would contribute to its effectiveness. This was a prerequisite for keeping ahead of its maritime rivals, and a policy it would adhere to in the future.

The Navy was quick to use new scientific instruments, such as John Hadley's reflecting quadrant from 1731 and the sextant invented by the Royal Navy officer John Campbell in 1757 that led to significant improvements in navigation. Also useful for navigation was the pioneering work by Greenville Collins, appointed in 1681 to survey the coasts of England, which led to the creation in 1795 of a hydrography department of the Navy. This produced the Admiralty charts that the whole world later was to rely on for navigation purposes. The problem of how to determine longitude – to enable the reckoning of a ship's position at sea – was solved by the clockmaker John Harrison, who was finally rewarded for his efforts with £20,000 in 1773, the Admiralty having sponsored research in this field as early as 1714.

On board ship, efforts to improve ventilation were being undertaken from the 1740s with the systems proposed by Samuel Sutton and Reverend Stephen Hales among the most popular. From the early 1760s, lightning conductors were installed on Royal Navy warships, and around the same period an improved design for a chain pump by Royal Navy Captain John Bentinck, and William Cole was trialled and

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in common use throughout Royal Navy ships after 1771. In performance-related trials this new pump could pump out a ton of water in just over 30 seconds with four men, whereas the old pump required seven men and twice the amount of time.

Perhaps the most important change in terms of improved conditions at sea, however, was not these mechanical or equipment-related advances, but the introduction of lemon juice as a preventative cure for scurvy, which was regularly issued in the Royal Navy from 1795.

When it came to firepower, improvements in gunnery invented by Admiral Charles Douglas from the early 1780s – such as the substitution of flannel for silk as a casing for cartridges, the introduction of steel springs to control the recoil of guns, and the devising of a gun lock – resulted in better and quicker firing practices. The introduction and use of the carronade, a short smoothbore cannon used from the 1770s, was to significantly augment the firepower available to Royal Navy ships playing a prominent role in the Battle of the Saintes in 1782, and during later actions.

In terms of battle tactics, additional techniques were added to *The Sailing and Fighting Instructions* – first issued in 1673, the Royal Navy's first publication of this kind – by James, Duke of York, (later James II), which stressed the importance of maintaining the line in battle. Revised in 1691, it formed the basis of British Naval tactics up to 1783. Also in print was *Regulations and Instructions Relating to HM Service at Sea*, which was first introduced in 1731 and was updated 13 times between then and 1806 before a new set of regulations was instituted.

Significant advances were also made in signalling at sea, using flags signals to communicate tactical instructions. In 1781, Admiral Richard Kempenfelt published his *General Instructions for the conduct of ships in war, explanatory of, and relative to the signals contained in the signal book herewith delivered* based on a method proposed by Lord Richard Howe. Howe, meanwhile, published his own signal books, *Primer of Speech for Fighting Ships* in 1782 and in 1790 *Signal Books for Ships of War*. The development of this manual semaphore system was accepted by the Admiralty in 1796 and installed in 15 stations, from the Admiralty House roof in London to Deal. This was then extended to Portsmouth

The Legacy of the Georgian Navy

and Plymouth. The system meant that in clear weather messages could be sent from the Admiralty to Deal in less than two minutes. In 1799, the Admiralty issued their own signal book. Signalling was further advanced by Sir Home Popham's *Telegraphic Signals of Marine Vocabulary* in 1800. This new signalling code came into common use almost instantly; Nelson's famous signal at Trafalgar in 1805, 'England Expects that every man will do his duty', was based on it.

The Royal Navy's fleet increased substantially, from 270 ships in the early part of the 18th century to 500 ships in 1793; and the number of people required to man the enlarged fleet rose from 48,000 in 1713 to 142,000 in 1813. Work continued on the Royal Naval dockyards in Portsmouth, Deptford, Woolwich, Chatham and Plymouth. Various naval dockyards overseas (for example, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, founded in 1749) ensured the maintenance of ships in foreign waters. Regular servicing of ships at these bases, using techniques such as careening (to scrape weeds and barnacles from hulls), ensured optimum sailing speeds and prevented the build-up of shipworm, which ate away at wooden hull timbers. Copper sheathing encasing ship's hulls also helped to eradicate this problem; introduced on 1761, it was fitted with more regularity during the 1780s.

The Royal Navy undertook celebrated feats of exploration during the period, which added to the human understanding of the world. The importance of this was recognised by the Admiralty in 1764 ahead of Captain John Byron's search for Terra Australis Incognita, saying that: 'nothing can redound more to the honour of a nation as maritime power, to the dignity of the Crown of Great Britain, and to the advancement of trade and navigation thereof, than to discoveries of countries hitherto unknown'. The most noted and epic of such voyages of exploration were those made by Captain James Cook between 1768 and 1779, which were instrumental in Britain deciding to colonise Australia and New Zealand in order to replace the North American colonies lost during the American War of Independence (1775–83).

Great strides were also made when it came to training, outfitting and caring for seamen and their families. An officers' training academy was

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opened in Portsmouth in 1733, and in 1748 uniforms for officers were introduced. The Royal Greenwich Hospital, which began to care for and admit in-pensioners from 1705, increased the number of spaces available. A dedicated seaman's hospital, Haslar hospital in Gosport – the largest brick building in Europe – started to admit patients in 1754, and another naval hospital, in Plymouth, opened in 1761. Royal Navy hospitals were also built abroad, in Port Mahon, Menorca (1711), Gibraltar (1741), Port Royal, Jamaica (1743), Madras (1745), Antigua (1763) and Halifax, Nova Scotia (1782). From 1763, Greenwich hospital also began to pay out-pensions to deserving candidates who had served in the Royal Navy, as well as providing pensions and allowances for widows and orphans of seamen. The Greenwich Hospital School, founded in 1712 to provide education to children of seamen killed in action, also later increased its intake capacity. A system to allow seamen to allot part of their pay to next of kin was introduced from 1795.

The popularity of the Royal Navy as a career option also increased, helped in no small part by George II sending his son, Prince Edward, into the Navy as a midshipman in 1758, thereby cementing its status in the public consciousness as a service for reputable employment and starting a tradition that has continued into modern times.

For all of these great and varied advancements, however, perhaps the overriding legacy of the Georgian Royal Navy was the crucial part it played in ensuring the nation's safety and prosperity in Britain's defeat of France at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, epitomised by victories in battles such as the Glorious First of June (1794), Cape St Vincent (1797), the Nile (1798), Copenhagen (1801) and Trafalgar (1805). These critical events, aided by both the technological advances of the equipment and techniques and the attitude, training and skill of the men of the Royal Navy – for all the harsh conditions and risks – gained Britain undisputed supremacy of the seas for the next century and firmly established Britain as a leading global power.

TIMELINE OF MAJOR NAVAL BATTLES AND EVENTS



1718–20 War for Sicily

31 July 1718 Battle of Cape Passaro

1739–48 War of the Austrian Succession (sometimes referred to as the War of Jenkins' Ear)

20–21 November 1739 Battle of Portobello

March–May 1740 Battle of Cartagena de Indias

11 February 1744 Battle of Toulon

1745 Capture of Louisbourg

25 July 1746 Battle of Negapatam

3 May 1747 First Battle of Cape Finisterre

14 October 1747 Second Battle of Cape Finisterre

1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle

1756–63 The Seven Years' War

8 June 1755 Battle off Cape Race, Newfoundland.

20 May 1756 Battle of Minorca

1758 Capture of Louisbourg

1759 Battle of Quebec

18–19 August 1759 Battle of Lagos

10 September 1759 Battle of Porto Novo (also known as the Battle of Pondicherry)

20 November 1759 Battle of Quiberon Bay

8 June 1761 Capture of Belle Île

June–August 1762 Capture of Havana

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1762 Manila taken

1763 Peace of Paris

1775–83 American Wars of Independence

27 July 1778 Battle of Ushant

6 July 1779 Battle of Grenada

16 January 1780 Battle of Cape St Vincent (also known as the ‘Moonlight battle’)

17 April 1780 Battle of Martinique

5 August 1781 Battle of Dogger Bank

5 September 1781 Battle of Chesapeake Bay

25–26 January 1782 Battle of St Kitts (also known as the Battle of Frigate Bay)

11 April 1782 Battle of Providien

9–12 April 1782 Battle of the Saintes

September 1782 Attack on Gibraltar

October 1782 Relief of Gibraltar

1783 Peace of Paris

1793–1802 French Revolutionary Wars

February 1793 Britain joins the war

August–December 1793 Allied occupation of Toulon

28 May–1 June 1794 Glorious First of June

14 March 1795 Battle of Genoa

17 June 1795 Action off Belle Île

23 June 1795 Battle of Groix

13 July 1795 Action off Hyères

1796 France invades Ireland, mainly defeated by poor weather

14 February 1797 Battle of Cape St Vincent

April–August 1797 Royal Navy mutinies at Spithead and Nore

24–25 July 1797 Nelson defeated at Tenerife, with loss of right arm

11 October 1797 Battle of Camperdown

1–2 May 1798 Battle of the Nile

2 April 1801 Battle of Copenhagen

6 July 1801 Battle of Algeciras

12 July 1801 Action off Cadiz

15 August 1801 Nelson attacks Boulogne flotilla with heavy losses

March 1802 Peace of Amiens

1803–15 Napoleonic Wars

1805 Villeneuve escapes from Toulon; Nelson pursues him to West Indies. Cornwallis holds Ganteaume inside Brest.

22 June 1805 Battle of Cape Finisterre

Timeline of Major Naval Battles and Events

21 October 1805 Battle of Trafalgar (Nelson killed)
4 November 1805 Battle of Cape Ortegal
January 1806 Capture of Cape Town
6 February 1806 Battle of San Domingo
2 October 1806 Boulogne set alight by rockets fired by British boats
February 1807 Dardanelles operation
2–4 September 1807 Bombardment of Copenhagen
November 1807 Evacuation of Portuguese fleet and royal family from Lisbon to Brazil
September 1808 Blockade of Russian Mediterranean fleet at Lisbon
10–11 April 1809 Battle of the Aix Roads
August 1809 Walcheren Expedition
26 October and 31 October 1809 Actions off Cette and Rosas Bay
13 March 1811 Battle of Lissa

1812–15 War of 1812

19 August 1812 HMS *Guerriere* captured by USS *Constitution*
25 October 1812 HMS *Macedonian* captured by USS *United States*
29 November 1812 HMS *Java* taken by USS *Constitution*
March 1813 Raids on Chesapeake Bay
1 June 1813 HMS *Shannon* captures USS *Chesapeake*
28 March 1814 HMS *Phoebe* takes the USS *Essex*
24–25 August 1814 Capture of Washington
12–14 September 1814 Attack on Baltimore
24 December 1814 Treaty of Ghent
8 January 1815 Battle of New Orleans
15 January 1815 Capture of USS *President*
1815 Treaty of Vienna
1816 Bombardment of Algiers

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